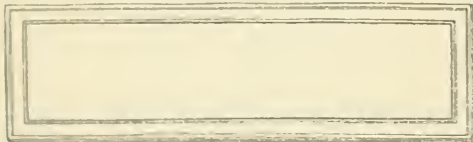
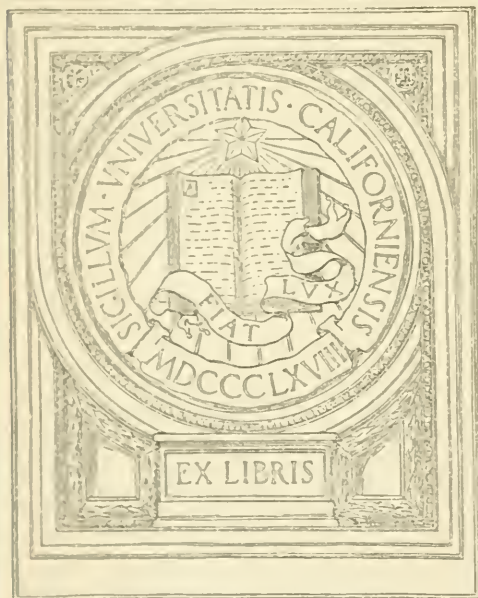


THE TARIFF  
REFORMERS  
BY GEORGE PEARSON



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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES



THE TARIFF REFORMERS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE ENEMIES OF ENGLAND

THE FRIENDS OF ENGLAND

THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND



real number 101  
(2)

# THE TARIFF REFORMERS

BY

HON. GEORGE PEEL

"If others entertain doubts as to the wisdom of the commercial policy adopted from 1841 to 1847, I entertain none, and shall do everything in my power to prevent the reversal of the policy, or the restoration of Protection, in any shape or on any pretence whatever."—*Letter of Sir Robert Peel, dated May 16, 1850*

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## PREFACE

**I**N January, 1913, it appeared to me desirable to furnish some account of the Tariff Reform crisis which took place in that month. Further, in view of the fact that the first ten years of the movement would be completed in May, it seemed opportune, while taking the events of January as a pivot, to review that political development as a whole.

A third motive has also prompted me to undertake this book. Occupied for many years in other work, I have had, during that period, no say of any kind in current politics. Yet, if the remark may be allowed, I have not altogether lost touch with public questions. I therefore venture to express my views on an issue which I have always held to be of the very first importance, and which now, as much as ever, holds the field.

Those who do me the honour to read this volume will, I think, readily understand how dangerous, in

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its imperial, its international, and its domestic, aspects, I hold Tariff Reform to be. They will understand not less easily how alienated are my political sympathies from the party which, during a decade, has associated itself ever more closely with that policy.

GEORGE PEEL

61 CATHERINE STREET,

BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W.

*March, 1913*

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. JANUARY, 1913 . . . . .	I
II. THE ALBERT HALL CONCERT . . . . .	4
III. MR. BALFOUR IN COVERT . . . . .	10
IV. TARIFF REFORMERS OFF THE SCENT . . . . .	21
V. TARIFF REFORMERS AND THE 1909 BUDGET . . . . .	31
VI. TARIFF REFORMERS AND THE LORDS . . . . .	48
VII. THE FALL OF MR. BALFOUR . . . . .	74
VIII. THE POLICY OF MR. BONAR LAW . . . . .	112
IX. THE CAUCUS TAKES CHARGE . . . . .	151
X. THE PANIC OF TARIFF REFORM . . . . .	165
XI. FREE TRADERS AND THE FUTURE . . . . .	173
INDEX . . . . .	185



# THE TARIFF REFORMERS

## CHAPTER I

JANUARY, 1913

I N January, 1913, there occurred one of the most surprising events in the annals of our domestic politics. Six weeks earlier, a great historic party in the State, amid a scene of indescribable enthusiasm, had bound itself in the most public and deliberate manner, and had pledged its faith and its future by the most formal and explicit undertaking, to the execution of a momentous imperialistic policy. Then there was a somersault. There was a "sudden wholesale abandonment, not on any question of principle, but to all appearances in a panic, of what we have all been preaching for years about our first constructive policy."<sup>1</sup>

This catastrophe was all the more astonishing because, during almost a decade, the whole tendency of Conservative policy had been moving,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Henry Chaplin, *Times*, February 10, 1913.

ever more decisively, the other way. For years, Tariff Reform had, gradually but irresistibly, been ousting and purging all elements other than itself from the corpus of Conservatism. By the close of 1912 it had become, on high authority, "the master-key of all Unionist activities."<sup>1</sup> Other opinions had been so cauterised as malignant, or had been so skilfully excised, that the organisation, though in theory charged with other functions, was now living practically for little else but Tariff Reform. In 1885, Lord Randolph Churchill had prophesied of the Liberals that "Chamberlain and the Birmingham Caucus will swallow you all."<sup>2</sup> By 1912 it was Conservatism that had been swallowed thus.

The wonder grows and deepens when it is remembered that, in the course of that same epoch, Tariff Reform had become a species of obsession to any number of minds. While the policy of Sir Robert Peel, of Lord Beaconsfield, and of Lord Salisbury, not to mention Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Cobden, had been increasingly scouted, in one sweeping ban of anathema, as a grotesque shibboleth and as an antediluvian absurdity, Tariff Reform, itself once a fetish, had

<sup>1</sup> "Unionist Policy," by Mr. F. E. Smith, 1913, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> "Life of Lord Randolph Churchill," by Mr. W. S. Churchill, vol. i. p. 416.



been steadily dignified into a faith. It had been extracted from local clubs and public-houses to be sublimated into a worship. Hitherto, its gongs and tomtoms had only beaten about the bush. Now, they led the chants of an inspired chorus.

Thus, Tariff Reform, towards the end of 1912, had an established air. Its pontiffs could afford to dispense with the "raging tearing propaganda" which had served the major prophets; its rabbis could calmly enjoin "self-sacrifice";<sup>1</sup> and its doctors, in rebuking Free Trade as Mammon,<sup>2</sup> could connect moral with fiscal duties.

Hence, as 1912 closed in, this creed, buttressed alike upon party and piety, the Jachin and Boaz of its temple, seemed irrefutably strong.

How incredible, therefore, that the Unionist party should so soon be walking their own "first constructive plank"!

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lord Selborne, at Southampton, October 19, 1912: "Tariff Reform has the noble spirit of self-sacrifice."

<sup>2</sup> The same, October 9, 1912.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ALBERT HALL CONCERT

THE extreme Tariff Reformer, or Confederate, if too pessimistic about his country, yet sometimes corrects that deficiency by being too optimistic about himself. Thus it is that when all national things go against him, when the "two bad winters" tarry, and trade booms, and our leading industries decline to be "going" or to "go," as foretold—then, in spite of all these adverse and depressing circumstances, the extreme Tariff Reformer, or Confederate, is still cheerful and, to use an American expression, "feels good."

This was the reason why, as the days of 1912 drew in, the hopes of that party drew out, so that they conceived that victory was imminent, and that they would be in office soon. Such were the thoughts of those who "think imperially."

Accordingly, a bumper meeting at the Albert Hall was arranged for mid-November to celebrate the

coming event. The highest authority reports: "In the middle of the month of November there was assembled in London the largest conference that ever met together, as delegates of the Unionist party from all parts of the country. For the first time in our history Liberal Unionists and Conservatives sat together in one conference." "The full policy of Tariff Reform and Imperial Preference . . . was carried with unanimity and enthusiasm."<sup>1</sup> Another reliable authority declares that there was "an ovation from the 12,000 delegates there assembled which has never, I believe, been rivalled. On what were they united? On Tariff Reform and effective Imperial Preference—the cardinal feature of the great constructive policy which has been preached on every platform for the last six years by a thoroughly united party."<sup>2</sup>

At this meeting, Lord Lansdowne, after stating that there was "a growing suspicion that the Government is a vast and organised conspiracy," made a most important announcement. For some time past the policy of the party had been that Tariff Reform should not be carried through Parliament until first submitted to a Referendum, or vote of the people. Lord Lansdowne now stated that the Referendum, as applied

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Austen Chamberlain, *Morning Post*, January 14, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Henry Chaplin, *Times*, February 10, 1913.

to Tariff Reform, would be dropped henceforth. For it would be unreasonable that the Tariff Reformers should come into office "hampered by an engagement of this kind. That is not a business proposition. If we win, as I believe we shall, we must come in free to raise taxation." <sup>1</sup> When in power they would "resort to" limited food-taxes, after due arrangement with the Dominions. They wanted an election, "whenever our opponents dare to meet us in the field." Loud-and-prolonged-cheers.

Mr. Bonar Law, who followed, could not speak for five minutes owing to the enthusiasm. Though "so touched" that at first he could hardly find utterance, he gathered voice to describe Tariff Reform as "our first constructive plank," and the Government as "gamblers and adventurers," leading the country "headlong to ruin." They managed "in secret by backstairs arrangements"; they had thriven on the "gospel of class hatred"; they were "sacrificing their Free Trade views"; their own measures would "wound and kill" them.

He favoured "so-called food taxes," using the revenue thence derived for the people's good. Thereby "we shall make the burden smaller, and not larger, that falls upon the working classes." He considered, with Lord Lansdowne, that they were

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Albert Hall, *Times*, November 15, 1912.

all united and were "moving rapidly to inevitable victory." Loud-and-prolonged-cheers ; encore.

Such was the Yuletide edition of Tariff Reform—the double number, brought out rather early in November, amid loud and prolonged ecstasy and jubilation.

A further important announcement was made by Mr. Austen Chamberlain at Glasgow a month later, in mid-December. He furnished precise facts and figures, almost in the spirit of a Chancellor of the Exchequer already introducing a Budget.<sup>1</sup> He said "we do not want to make food dearer : we want to make it more plentiful." With this good end in view, "we propose to put on foreign wheat a duty of 2s. a quarter." Speaking "on behalf of the leaders of my party," he would not tax wheat more than at that rate.

Turning from wheat to other foodstuffs, he announced "on other foodstuffs a duty not exceeding 5 per cent *ad valorem* on the foreign supply, with such abatements or total exemptions in favour of Colonial produce as may seem desirable." This was surely a little strange from one so desirous at all hazards "to bind up" the Empire by trade. For instance, Canada sends us foodstuffs such as oats, maize, fish, fruit, bacon, cheese, and butter. And here were Imperial

<sup>1</sup> *Times* and *Glasgow Herald*, December 13, 1912.

thinkers even contemplating abatements in taxes to be placed by themselves on Colonial imports! The policy of that "futile superstition, that inept prejudice," Free Trade,<sup>1</sup> had been to give an unquestioned open market to all these Colonial goods. Yet henceforth we were to "cement" each other by an abatement, perhaps, on bacon, or to "mould our imperial destinies" by a possible rebate on cheese.

Mr. Austen Chamberlain's third proposal pledged his party to "a great change in our fiscal system . . . for manufactured goods we think that an average of 10 per cent. is quite as high as we need go." He repeated this speech, in general outline, at Carlisle, on December 16.

It is most worthy of note that, on this latter date, Mr. Bonar Law made another speech, at Ashton-under-Lyne. He declared that he wished to amplify what "was stated very briefly, but, I think, clearly, by Lord Lansdowne at the Albert Hall," as regards the food duties. But Mr. Bonar Law now appeared to qualify rather than to amplify, and to speak with a quaver in his voice. "For nine years," he said, "we have kept the flag flying, and if there is any sincerity in political life at all, this is not the time, and, at all events, I am not the man to haul down that flag." In spite of this alleged heroic incapacity, he

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, *Times*, October 7, 1903.

explained that, on taking office, they would call a conference of the Dominions, and only at the request of the Dominions would they impose food duties, and not till then.<sup>1</sup>

This was, in effect, a change of policy. It was now desired to throw upon the Dominions the ultimate responsibility for these food-taxes, and to intimate that we ourselves did not want to impose them, after all. Why this sudden rift in the Protectionist lute, and these strange variations from the harmony of the Albert Hall concert? Could it be that, for some reason yet unexplained, a "panic" was afoot among the audience, and that a *sauve-qui-peut* was spreading even to the orchestra and the conductor's box?

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, December 17, 1912.

## CHAPTER III

### MR. BALFOUR IN COVERT

HOW was it that, by the close of 1912, these orders and counter-orders, these marches and counter-marches, were being executed with such precipitation in the army of Tariff Reform? In order to understand this clearly, it is desirable to review the facts of recent history.

When in May, 1903, Mr. Chamberlain put forth his scheme, Mr. Balfour was, of course, the head of the party, and remained so till he resigned in November, 1911. During those eight years and more the public never, perhaps, fully realised his fiscal attitude, and a literature arose to explain it. But it is better, instead of combating or correcting the views of others on this subject, simply to state the facts, and to trace their momentous result upon the commonwealth.

To comprehend this matter, it is necessary to remember that Mr. Balfour had already dealt with



economics in the nineteenth century, and that the practical measure to which he then applied himself was the establishment of Bimetallism. He became the spokesman of a powerful and numerous party, and did not fail to advocate that policy with zest. Bimetallism, it has been rather too unkindly said, amounts to a proposal to take a shilling, and call it a florin, or thereabouts. At any rate, Bimetallists sought to name and fix the market relation between gold and silver artificially by statute, and to introduce the latter metal without limit into currency at the assigned value. Thus the worth of the currency would be lowered by the influx of a mass of silver into circulation, and it was hoped that prices might be correspondingly raised or steadied.

This scheme of extraordinary finance, if adopted, would certainly have volatilised our credit, which, since the Act of 1819, has been wholly based on gold. Yet Mr. Balfour, when First Lord of the Treasury, was still "a confirmed and pronounced Bimetallist."<sup>1</sup>

The advocates of this singular nostrum in course of time abated something of their demands. But Mr. Balfour maintained the combat by hostility to that measure for a gold standard which has done so much for India, and by showing his desire to "go back" upon it, and to "reopen

<sup>1</sup> Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Hansard, March 17, 1896.

the Indian mints" to the unlimited coinage of silver.<sup>1</sup>

Next, in 1897, a bimetallic negotiation was instituted with the idea of introducing a quantum of silver among the gold constituting the basis of our national credit at the Bank of England. This last attempt was too much for the City, and Bimetallism was mortally affected by the explosion of opinion in that quarter. Mr. Chaplin, however, drove up with the ambulance, and Mr. Balfour was wafted from the field. But his economic nerve, so it seemed, was severely shaken. Ever critical of the authorised version, ever in rebound against the accepted creed, he would, in the future, write and speak freely on economics. This Good Samaritan to theories in distress would even favour an important fiscal policy that had seen better days. But he would never really adopt for execution a definite economic plan, worked out up to the point of facts and figures, after such adverse experiences as these.

All this is a clue to what happened now.

When Mr. Chamberlain in May, 1903, put forth his policy, did Mr. Balfour favour it? Yes. Did he adopt it? No.

The first of these two propositions can be sustained by overwhelming proofs. In his first utterance in the House of Commons, Mr. Balfour said that

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Balfour, Hansard, March 17, 1896.

not only was there "no contradiction" between himself and Mr. Chamberlain, but that there was "absolute conformity" in the trend of their thought.<sup>1</sup>

Again, in his first pronouncement on a public platform, at Sheffield, he declared that if he was asked, "Do you desire to reverse the fiscal tradition, to alter fundamentally the fiscal tradition, which has prevailed during the last two generations?" he would reply, "Yes, I do."<sup>2</sup>

His conduct, however, was not less significant than his words. That all the Free Traders retired from his Cabinet, and that he appointed Mr. Austen Chamberlain as his Chancellor of the Exchequer, are proofs of how decidedly his sympathies were ranged on Mr. Chamberlain's side from the first.

Nevertheless, although it is certain that Mr. Balfour favoured Mr. Chamberlain's policy, it is not less certain that he was determined not to adopt it, for an indefinite time at least. This latter fact needs to be fully established, because it had very important consequences.

In his first speech in the House of Commons already quoted, Mr. Balfour said with reference to Imperial Preference: "This question is not one that this House will have to decide this session, or next session, or the session after; it is not a question

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, May 28, 1903, pp. 163-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, October 2, 1903.

that the existing House of Commons will have to decide at all. It is not a question connected with this year's Budget or with next year's. It is a question of our future fiscal policy which requires a most careful study." <sup>1</sup>

This was indeed the consignment of Tariff Reform to an almost Siberian exile, or to the cold storage of time. While the Empire was tumbling about our ears; while "agriculture has been practically destroyed; sugar has gone; iron is threatened; wool is threatened; cotton will go"; while our "working men are like sheep in a field; one by one they allow themselves to be led to slaughter" <sup>2</sup> . . . in this burning crisis of fate, it was then that Mr. Balfour reduced the temperature to that of a "question," or suggested "careful study," in the spirit of a tutor mildly indicating a possible theme for a potential "Long."

And again, in the letter in which he parted a little later from Mr. Chamberlain as Minister, he repeated that "if Preference involves, as it almost certainly does, taxation, however light, upon foodstuffs, I am convinced with you that public opinion is not yet ripe for such an arrangement." <sup>3</sup> Therefore, he

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, May 28, 1903, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> "Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches," 1903, second edition, p. 61. Greenock, October 7, 1903.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Register*, 1903, p. 200. Letter dated September 16, 1903.

acquiesced in Mr. Chamberlain's retirement from office in order that he might pursue the work of the campaign in the country.

The whole history of this question during the subsequent eight years is contained in germ in these quotations. It is apparent that Mr. Balfour approved of the general tenor of Mr. Chamberlain's policy, but nevertheless declined to have an active hand in it. That was for others, not for him. He would await the conversion of the public to the taxation of wheat and to Protection. If that should happen, good ; if not, then good also. In golfing phrase, he was "dormy."

As the months passed, however, Mr. Chamberlain promised to become so active as to be dangerous, and Mr. Balfour, who was resolute to do nothing, became evidently aware that something more must be proffered than a sheer *non possumus*, if the triple shape of Protection, Preference, and Retaliation were to be baulked. In this difficulty, the first soporific which he tendered was entitled "Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade."

The analytical faculty, the scientific proclivity, and the acute imagination of the eminent statesman are, for once, not apparent in that work. The thought, and the style with it, is faltering and vague. There is much about the "flow" of capital and labour, economic friction, cosmopolitan economics, an

imaginary island, and the dynamics of commerce. St. Vincent is discussed academically, and there flits over the scene a Free Trade manufacturer hypothetically, if unintelligibly, "undersold by himself"! Eventually, on the last page, the author, who opens as a dubious Free Trader, suddenly dismisses that policy as "extraordinarily foolish," and sets forth to "plead for freedom," that is, for power to tax imports from abroad. Finis.

To so direct a mind as that of Mr. Chamberlain, it must soon have become evident that this plea "for freedom" did not mean much; for, if it did, the Prime Minister, instead of pleading, could introduce a measure, of which, in fact, he had no thought. Accordingly, Birmingham, in August, 1904,<sup>1</sup> felt it necessary to draw the wood, and Mr. Balfour, after a brief sporting point, and a smart challenge in the open, doubled back into covert in October, this time with the pack at his heels.

Now that the "Economic Notes" had died away into the distance, not having fallen favourably upon the ears of Birmingham, it was absolutely essential to advance a fresh proposal, in avoidance of any definite act. In this difficulty Mr. Balfour, while declaring that "I individually am not a Protectionist," suggested a Colonial Conference—"a free

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Annual Register*, 1904, p. 192.

Conference," where people might "talk out this subject in the freest possible manner, without being bound by special views or special instructions." <sup>1</sup> After the next election here, he would summon such a Conference; there would be the requisite conversation; and then all parties, Colonial and other, would disperse, only to appeal yet again to their bewildered voters.

He repeated and re-emphasised this plan for some months: "if the scheme which I have many times recommended to the country was carried out, I do not see that the country could be called upon to decide the Colonial aspect of this question until not only one but two elections have passed." <sup>2</sup>

Tariff Reform to be "talked out"! A "Free Trade (of dissolutions) within the empire"! An export and import (of general elections) to bind up ourselves and our Dominions! This would not by any means satisfy those relentless Midlanders. But it carried Mr. Balfour into 1905.

The year 1905 is not a bright one in our public life. Now at length, after nearly two years of pause and postponement, of hesitation and hint, the loopholes of escape seemed nearly exhausted. Important fiscal debates were held in the House of Commons in which the Prime Minister did not

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, October 4, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, January 28, 1905.



take a part at all. Resolution after resolution affirming Free Trade was carried against him in his absence. Or else, fierce argument between Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Hugh Cecil was conducted in his presence, as to what his fiscal opinions really were. Then the pedants saw their chance to mobilise. An exegesis arose as to his genuine convictions. Political scholars collated texts, and brought out editions, with learned annotations and prolegomena, as though the Prime Minister were an Alexandrian patriarch. Commentaries worthy of a Lightfoot or a Hort were compiled and refuted. To judge by the obscurity which men found in him, he might have been an early Father or a modern poet. Cabinet ministers fought like critics, and critics like Cabinet ministers. Grave citizens, who thought that they had proved him Protectionist or Free Trader, awaited his next utterance with as much anxiety as, in ordinary times, they would await the Derby sweep.

But it was evident, and even proper, that all this should not last too long. The end was approaching, and it was right that it should approach. For the British Government cannot comfortably repose on the horns of dilemmas. Chopped logic is not imperial food.

It was not unfitting that the *coup-de-grâce* in



this instance should be administered by Mr. Chamberlain himself. November, 1905, was the fateful time. "The election continually recedes into the background—I wish an election," the master said. And then he proceeded to vent upon the Prime Minister that unsparing invective, distilled from the pent-up impatience of years. The recent proceedings of the Government, he said, "were more humiliating to ourselves, to a great party, than I can recollect in the course of my political experience." <sup>1</sup> "We left the field to our opponents—I hope that no such strain will ever again be put on the loyalty of our party. I do not like running away." And next, in recessional, he faced unshrinking the impending doom. In his high vein of combat, he called it "an agreeable prospect," a chance to "shake off the apathy which has been born of timorous counsels and of half-hearted convictions." Once more, ere he had done, he poured contempt upon "the weaker brothers!—the brethren who have no beliefs to speak of, or have been persuaded not to believe them too hard—they have always gone to the wall! I will not pretend to you that I am sorry. I will not pretend to you that I pity them."

And, at the close, this Ulysses spoke as strong men speak. "The issues are too important to

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, November 4, 1905.

be minimised or concealed. We will do our best to make them clear. We will win our victory, if we can. We will accept our beating, if we are beaten, with the determination to fight again.

## CHAPTER IV

### TARIFF REFORMERS OFF THE SCENT

AS soon as the electoral landslide of January, 1906, had relegated Tariff Reformers to Opposition, people began to count heads—at least such heads as had not been broken. It was computed that Tariff Reformers numbered 102; Balfourites, 36; Unionist Free Traders, 16, or thereabouts.<sup>1</sup>

From these facts it was generally inferred that Mr. Balfour's shrift would be short; and that as, in the eyes of Tariff Reformers, he had been responsible for the disaster, he would have to make way for a better chief. And indeed, with his scanty territorial troop of Balfourites pitted against the whole disciplined squadron of Birmingham iron-sides, the ex-Premier looked in a parlous state indeed.

Yet as a matter of fact, 1906 was to prove one of the most successful years of Mr. Balfour's political

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Duke of Devonshire's speech, *Times*, March 7, 1906.

life. He was to emerge a winner. His policy up to that date had been to lead by the bridle, but in nowise to mount, the too fiery Pegasus of Tariff Reform that ambled sideways after him. And to these pedestrian tactics he now adhered with astonishing advantage, in spite of all Mr. Chamberlain's incitements to him to spring to the saddle and take his chance of a spill.

Some little time back he had read his policy to a public audience from the historic half sheet of note-paper. This Half Sheet, however, had proved about as clear as cuneiform to the average elector, and men felt that when they asked him for taxed bread he had offered them a Rosetta stone of obscure hieroglyphics. So now he published, in further elucidation, his scarcely less memorable Valentine letter.<sup>1</sup>

In this letter Mr. Balfour stated that "fiscal reform is, and must remain, the first constructive work of the Unionist party." Note the important limiting adjective, "constructive." Next, he declared that "closer commercial union with the Colonies," and "a moderate general tariff on manufactured goods," and "a small duty on foreign corn" are "not in principle objectionable and should be adopted." But at the word "adopted" there was no full stop or even semi-colon, and the words "if shown to be necessary" come immediately next.

<sup>1</sup> Dated February 14, 1906.

It is almost incredible to have to record that Mr. Chamberlain at once accepted this announcement. "I cordially welcome . . . I entirely agree . . . I gladly accept," he wrote; and "any services that I can render will be entirely at your disposal."<sup>1</sup> But, of course, Mr. Balfour had committed himself to nothing, thanks to that beneficial "if." He had merely changed hands on the bridle from the curb to the snaffle. He would not mount. But he had secured a certificate of horsemanship without riding. Tariff Reformers had bound themselves to him, not vice versâ.

The swift consolidation of this unexpected victory by Mr. Balfour is the fiscal history of 1906. It at once became his cue to ignore Tariff Reform as far as possible, or to live it down to its grave. He poured out eloquent speech after speech on the platform with little or nothing about it. The "first constructive plank" might as well have been a worm-eaten joist, mere matter for logrolling, or a green sapling yet uncut. In May, at the Albert Hall, before Primrose Knights harbinger, and in reach of the eloquence of Mr. Wyndham, nothing;<sup>2</sup> nothing in July, before the reorganised National Union of Conservative Associations;<sup>3</sup> nothing in

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, February 15, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, May 3, 1906.

<sup>3</sup> *Times*, July 28, 1906.

November, at the Gaiety Restaurant, to cure the deepening winter of Tariff Reform discontent. Instead, much output anent Scottish small-holders, or municipal elections, or Irish Land, or the rights and wrongs of Merchant Shipping. It was now the turn of Tariff Reform to seem "going" or "gone." People asked if they were to be led "like sheep to the slaughter." How long would they stand it?

It was evident, however, that, as the year 1907 began to open, the eyes of watchful Tariff Reformers began to open too, and to perceive that with Mr. Balfour they were making small progress, after all. Mr. Leo Maxse, editor of the *National Review*, and the St. Just of Tariff Reform, began to point significantly to certain "organisers of disaster"<sup>1</sup> on the Opposition bench. There were other ominous symptoms of incipient discontent. Consequently, Mr. Balfour had to consider what other quarry, now that "Economic Notes," and then the "two elections scheme" and then the "Valentine letter," had in turn served their purpose and exhausted their availability, might next be cast over the sledge to the pursuing pack.

In this difficulty he fixed, with unflinching resource, upon the theme that there must inevitably and naturally be some "broadening of taxation," and that right soon. For he argued that, as the Govern-

<sup>1</sup> *National Review*, February, 1907.

ment were active social reformers, all this would mean money; money would mean more taxation; more taxation would inevitably imply Tariff Reform. Thus Tariff Reform was, as it were, growing naturally; it was a spontaneous thing, a logical necessity, a natural product of Providence. Here was the suggestion that he now tossed into the snow as he flew in front.

This, then, was the new expedient to which he resorted as from February, 1907. Thus, on February 1, nothing, it seemed, could be done unless we "broaden the basis of our taxation."<sup>1</sup> He thought that this would come even in the time of the existing Government. Again, on February 15, after rebuking the pernicious depression of critics he pointed to the cheerful prospect that the subjects of reform before the Government could not be executed except by "broadening the basis of taxation."<sup>2</sup> On February 20, in the House, he said a little boldly that "a reason for broadening the basis of taxation is to meet the needs of the poorer classes."<sup>3</sup> On May 3, "to extend the basis of taxation"<sup>4</sup> was the only remedy for the State.

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, February 2, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, February 16, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, February 20, 1907, p. 874.

<sup>4</sup> *Times*, May 4, 1907.

What was so extraordinary was that Mr. Austen Chamberlain joined in the cry, as disastrously for the progress of Tariff Reform as was the acceptance the year before by his father of the Valentine letter. For, clearly, if Tariff Reform was to come by itself, what need of all this fuss and ferment on the part of Tariff Reformers—what need to mow the meadow of Cobdenism with sweat and labour, when Time with his scythe was bound to do it gratis?

It is probable, then, that never, in the history of our politics, were there members of Parliament in more mental entanglement than were the Tariff Reformers at the close of 1907. Could they ask Mr. Balfour once more what he believed? But he had told them flatly that he would issue no more monthly bulletins as to his fiscality. Could they elect another leader? But he towered above them, telling them straight that he was more active and attentive to his duties in Parliament than they. Could they depose him and put the leadership in commission? Impossible, when here were Mr. Joseph and Mr. Austen, the one bound to his car by acceptance of the Valentine letter, and the other echoing and endorsing, up and down the country, his suggestion as to broadening the base. Where did they stand? For reply, the dizzy stalwarts of Birmingham saw the ground of Tariff Reform shift



and reel beneath them, as the wizard plied them at every speech with strong arguments for their own policy, arguments novel to their palates and so much daintier than their own. His variety of entertainment was so infinite. While the Tariff Reform League was in labour with mere triplets, Protection, Preference, and Retaliation, this inexhaustible performer had produced a whole litter from his hat!

As 1908 opened and proceeded, the hopes of Tariff Reformers increased in certainty, and their tone waxed more and more confident. Everything appeared to conspire against Free Trade. The economic crisis in the United States of the preceding autumn had begun to tell upon the world at large, so that on all hands there were signs of a slackening commerce, accompanied by a less buoyant revenue. The country grew restless and discontented at the rising price of bread. As in trade, so in politics there was a decided reaction and ebb from the high tide of the 1906 elections, and seat after seat began to be lost to the Government.

It may be said, indeed, that March, 1908, was the month when the prospects of Free Trade showed darker than at any date since the days of Cobden. A rot had apparently set in. On March 12, Lord Rosebery, ever sensitive to the

shifting breeze, began to doubt and to discuss : Free Trade was very well, in his opinion, yet he preferred Protection to Socialism—"Socialism, the end of all things, empire, religious faith, freedom, property—Socialism is the death-blow to all." <sup>1</sup> On March 17, the Associated Chambers of Commerce swelled the retreat, passing a strong resolution for Tariff Reform. Next, on March 31, came the triumphant Mr. Balfour telling the House of Commons : "I believe you will be driven, whether you like it or not, to widen the basis of your taxation." <sup>2</sup>

As the months sped, the situation worsened. In the House of Lords, Lord St. Aldwyn, the Agamemnon of the Free Trade Unionists, prepared for flight. "I believe," he said, "the repugnance which undoubtedly existed to duties on corn, meat, and dairy produce has diminished." And again, speaking of an Imperial Preferential duty on wheat : "I think that the feeling of the country is tending in favour of its adoption." <sup>3</sup> Was the end in sight ?

It was under the influence of these accumulating evidences of a triumph which was clearly seeking him out of its own accord to be its instrument ; it

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, March 13, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard, March 31, 1908, p. 436.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, May 21, 1908, pp. 424 and 429.

was with success volunteering before his eyes ; it was under the dazzling conviction of the imminent catastrophe of Free Trade—that the cool general, the circumspect philosopher, for once, and once only, laid aside all reserve and all prudence, plunging at last hot-foot into Tariff Reform. He began quietly : “ I am a profound believer in what fiscal reform can do . . . for the stability of trade and for the growth of national industries . . . fiscal reform can improve the general condition of trade.”<sup>1</sup> But in November he abandoned himself to fiscal emotion, in perhaps the only passage of real and undiluted rhetoric that has ever passed his lips. “ Month by month, as the policy of the present Government develops, and as the necessities of the situation make themselves felt more and more, it becomes clear to friends and foes alike that fiscal reform is no remote ideal, is no distant prospect, but that all the movements of thought, all the political forces, all the trend of economic speculation, are alike driving us to this great change in our system . . . the time, I say, is coming when that great policy will be turned from an ardent hope into a practical reality.” Loud-and-continued-cheers. “ Every man now knows in his heart that a momentous epoch is approaching, that the first breath of the

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, October 7, 1908.

new era is making itself felt, that the dawn of the new day is already visible on the horizon." <sup>1</sup> Loud-and-prolonged-cheers.

Then, calmly and solemnly, he pledged himself and his party "to the task of carrying out these doctrines in a practical shape." The Tariff Reformers, like sportsmen, murmured on all sides that they had bagged their fox.

Yet, in reality, if men had known it, this was the gravest miscalculation of Mr. Balfour's life. Lord Randolph Churchill, on a memorable occasion, forgot Goschen. Mr. Balfour, on this occasion on which far more momentous issues hung, made a worse omission. For he forgot our national resources as developed by Free Trade.

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, November 20, 1908.

## CHAPTER V

### TARIFF REFORMERS AND THE 1909 BUDGET

THUS, during 1908 and at the opening of 1909, the idea was sedulously enforced and industriously propagated that Free Trade was about to be adjudged bankrupt without visible assets. The chief exponent of this view was Mr. Balfour. From the very first, and throughout this business, his policy had been to favour, but not actively adopt, Tariff Reform, and so it would be specially welcome for him to contemplate its early adoption, not by himself but by fortune. No need for Sisyphus to labour, if the stone of Protection were really rolling of itself uphill.

It would have been perhaps wiser if the general had lain in his trenches snugly, and had waited to see whether starvation would do its work upon the garrison which he supposed to be famishing. As it was, he demonstrated in the open, attracted attention by his glad *feu-de-joie*, and revealed his position with unforeseen results.

How was it that he had become so certain? The facts of that time, if studied, will furnish a conclusive explanation.

Mr. Asquith, in introducing, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, his Budget of 1907, had laid it down as a sound maxim that "the country has reached a stage in which we cannot afford to drift along the stream and treat each year's finance as if it were self-contained." The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in other words, ought to budget, not for one, but for several years.<sup>1</sup> The main reason of this dictum was that "nothing calls so loudly, or so imperiously, as the possibilities of social reform." For, first, there was the appeal of the child, the raw material of the future; the State could in nowise afford to pass by that appeal with folded arms, though it had been neglected by generation after generation of humane and far-sighted statesmen. Beyond the child rose the figure of the man or woman who, spent out with a life of ill-requited labour, too often found themselves confronted in old age, without fault or demerit of their own, with the prospect of physical want or the sacrifice of self-respect. These were the urgent, long-delayed, and overdue problems of social reform which Mr. Asquith handled, opening the gate, and straightening the way to a better future.

These coming burdens the Chancellor proposed

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, April 18, 1907, p. 1186.

to meet from within the four corners of Free Trade ; for "the resources of taxation, within Free Trade, are not yet exhausted." Be it observed, however, that Mr. Asquith was speaking at a time when, tried by all the ordinary tests, the trade of the United Kingdom, both at home and oversea, had rarely been more active and flourishing. But shortly after, towards the close of 1907, and during 1908, our commerce began to evince a definite reaction ; and therefore Tariff Reformers were justifiably enabled to look forward with keen anticipation to future difficulties, and to suppose that "not yet" might shortly be transfigured into "now" by Providence.

Their second ground for such a forecast was to be discovered in the Budget of 1908, also introduced by Mr. Asquith. In spite of the fact that we were on the ebb tide of business, he dealt with the sugar duties, imposed by Sir Michael Hicks Beach to meet war expenses, as that statesman's method of "broadening the base." Notwithstanding such an authority, to a Free Trader those duties must always carry a distasteful flavour, because, though highly productive, they constitute a tax both upon the raw material of important industries and also upon food. Here, then, a sweeping reduction was made. A sweeping reduction of revenue with a contracting commerce ! Another nail for the Free Trade coffin !

But there was much more to come of comfort and satisfaction for Tariff Reform at this date. At the opening of 1909 Old Age Pensions were to come into full operation. Surely the Budget of 1909 would be swamped by that impossible cargo. The Free Trade merchantman would presently be beached by the swiftly falling current of prosperity, or posted as derelict at Lloyd's.

And yet, now and then, to those who listened more attentively, or heard with a more open mind, or did not forget Mr. Asquith, or believed in our resources as developed by Free Trade, there was audible during 1908 another sound than that of the incipient debacle of "Cobdenism." In May Mr. Asquith gave his warning: "In my judgment there cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that a Free Trade Finance Minister has come to, or is nearly approaching, the end of his resources in the matter of new taxation."<sup>1</sup> In December again he uttered a more startling, a more perturbing note. The Budget of next year "will stand at the very centre of our work. . . . By it we shall be judged in the estimation both of the present and of posterity."<sup>2</sup> But these scattered yet significant intimations found no public to heed them in the market-place of Tariff

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, May 7, 1908, p. 480.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, December 11, 1908.



Reform. They were engulfed in the babel of pleasurable hopes.

In the certainty that, counting large extra demands for the Navy and the great cost of Old Age Pensions, there would be a huge deficit in the coming Budget, and that Free Trade would be brought to bay, Mr. Balfour addressed a great meeting early in March, 1909. He was never more happy than on that occasion—his kindling sarcasm, his mordant irony, his trenchant dialectics flashed triumphantly from pole to pole. He nearly rollicked that day. He inquired gaily after the “dogmatic arrogance” and the “insolent affectation of intellectual superiority” of Free Traders, now perforce laid aside. Mr. Cobden did not profess to be “a profound scientific economist.” “The whole dogmatic case, as Mr. Cobden conceived it,” was dead and gone. He jeered at the Government “with a big Budget in front of it.” And then in affected emotion and in simulated pathos, he vowed that he was “really sorry for the Prime Minister.” With eager gusto and scarcely disguised glee, he protested that the process “of knocking Ministerial heads together is too easy to be gratifying.” And last, dropping into solemnity, he propounded that “the old system must be changed,” and that “those changes are bound to come.”<sup>1</sup> Loud-and-prolonged-cheers

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, March 13, 1909.

from many a good knight harbinger. Yet, for all their harbinging, the stout knights harbinger harbingered not well that day.

Stupendous, therefore, was the audience of M.P.'s, Peers, Tariff Reformers, distinguished strangers, and pressmen that gathered together in the closing hours of April, 1909, to hear the last of "Cobdenism," to assist at the obsequies of the Free Trade policy, and at the assured apotheosis of Tariff Reform.

It took the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lloyd George, over four hours, twenty columns of the *Times*, and seventy-five columns of Hansard, to lay these optimistic dreams, these long-nurtured certainties, in the dust. We must pay for the Navy; we must honour the cheque, the thrice-defaulted obligation, of Old Age Pensions; we must provide, not only for this year but for future years, "a revenue of such an expansive character as to grow with the growing demands of the social programme." "This is a war Budget," the Chancellor concluded plainly. "It is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty." But, terrible to relate, all this long catalogue of measures was to be executed without departing one hair's breadth from the very strictest adherence to Free Trade principles.

Then was witnessed a spectacle in our politics

which for fury had not been seen since the days of 1846. As we read the reports of their utterances, politicians seemed wellnigh unhinged. In the House the Budget was called "the history of Monte Cristo," "an insane proposal," and "the maddest Budget." A duke roundly denounced the authors of the measure as "a pirate crew of political tatterdemalions, who now vainly tried to hide the red flag of Socialism." Lord Rosebery inveighed against it melodramatically as a "revolution," and then repeated, with variations, his famous peroration of the previous year; "Socialism is the end of all—the negation of faith, of family, of property, of monarchy, of empire." <sup>1</sup> Loud-and-prolonged-cheers. Another peer likened the Chancellor to the robber-gull.

Meanwhile, in clubland and in cityland, the tide of angry indignation rose with almost overwhelming speed and volume. A memorial was prepared in May in the City to combat the Free Trade Budget. In measured, guarded, and responsible language this manifesto chid with circumspection and damned discreetly. The chief expedients of the Budget would prove "seriously injurious to the commerce and industries of the country"; they would "tend to discourage private enterprise and thrift"; their effect would be in

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, September 11, 1909.

the future that of "diminishing employment and reducing wages." <sup>1</sup> *Roma locuta est.*

This document, composed *ex cathedrâ*, lay for signature at Martin's Bank where, all day long, awed commissionaires, and abashed clerks, and all-important city editors reverently watched the entry and exit of merchant princes and millionaires. Carried away by the potent impulses of the financial fraternity, even staunch Free Traders affixed their names. The world wondered to read the signatures of the youthful Marcellus of City Free Trade, and of Sir Felix Schuster, its Atticus, and above all, of Lord Avebury, its venerable Nestor. By some strange and even impish fatality, almost from that very month of May, commerce, industry, private enterprise, thrift, and employment, so authoritatively pronounced to be "going," began to revive actively and to take a long lease of unparalleled energy.

Yet, of course, from the moment that Mr. Lloyd George sate down, the main centre of interest and speculation was Mr. Balfour. But the ex-Premier did not speak that night.

His latest resource had broken under him. All the bright hopes, the merry innuendoes, the gay anticipations which he had woven and spun before the glad eyes of bannerets and Primrose dames, in many

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, May 15, 1909.

a prophetic peroration or mocking exordium, as to the imminent collapse of Free Trade finance, had vanished into the cold April air. It was he who had lured his followers on into the bog. He had told them, time and again, that Free Trade was bankrupt, and that Tariff Reform was marching into possession by foreclosure. And now no eye so dull and no intellect so blunted as not to know that he had led them wrong.

Therefore, when he came to speak on the Budget, friend and foe alike must have recognised the profound change in the situation for him. The exquisite banter of March, the pitying condescension for the Prime Minister, the affected clemency in the too easy task of knocking Free Trade heads together, all were gone. With not all his old skill in fence he fell back on invective, covering his retreat less from his political opponents than from his own Tariff Reformers, who now began to murmur and to eye him with something more than reproach. The Budget was an "electioneering manifesto,"<sup>1</sup> he said: the Chancellor "forgot his principles and thought only of his votes."<sup>2</sup> This and that were "not only grossly unfair but quite unworkable," and "absolutely grotesque." The Government was "blind and ignorant."

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, May 3, 1909, p. 751.

*Ibid.*, p. 763.

To Tariff Reformers it became more and more obvious, as the summer of 1909 advanced, that, for the sake of their policy, the Budget must be beaten at all costs. But on November 5, after a battle royal of six months' discussion, it passed the House of Commons. Then, at all hazards, as a final resource, it must be beaten in the House of Lords. But would the House of Lords assent to register that suggestion and execute that bold plan of throwing out the Budget?

This proposal of the Tariff Reformers was bound to cause more searchings of heart among responsible statesmen in the Upper Assembly than had been felt at any time within memory. Doubtless, no legal enactments prescribe the relationship of the two Houses in this regard, but the Constitution, that is, the custom of state, had ruled unbrokenly and with increasing clearness that the Lords do not exercise any right of rejecting the whole supply for the year. This stood *communi sponsione reipublicæ*. Such was the precedent, the usage, the wisdom, the acquiescence of all.

As soon as such a scheme was even mooted, all the familiar story revived in the memory of those who had regard to parliamentary history—how, in 1628, it was established that the Lords had no voice in the grant of taxation—how, even in 1640, the Lords themselves had stated that “subsidy

belongs properly and entirely to the House of Commons"—how, in 1671 and 1678, the second step was taken in the constitutional highway, the denial to the Lords of the application of voted money. There were the events of 1688—the words of Chatham that “the taxes are a voluntary gift of the Commons alone”—the dictum of Burke that “the Lords have no right to the disposition, in any sense, of the public purse”—the action of the younger Pitt—the exposition of Lord Russell in 1860. Surely, the peers would not fly in the face of such a converging weight of historical testimony: they would not reverse their Constitution of centuries, at the instigation of Tariff Reform.

One remembered, too, the significance of the normal financial procedure. First come the annual Estimates of expenditure, of which the Lords have no cognisance, and on which all Ways and Means are eventually based. Then the Throne asks for supplies to defray and discharge these necessities. Last, the House of Commons assents to that requisition: the Crown appeals to the Commons for money, and the Commons grant it. For the Lords to intercept all the supplies thus formally bestowed and now embodied in the annual Finance Bill, was not merely to throw the whole national economy out of gear, but it was to violate an absolutely unbroken procedure, and still more to upset the balance of the entire Constitution.



Men felt confident that Mr. Balfour, at all events, would not be a consenting party to such an act. They recalled his words of 1907, "the House of Lords cannot touch these money bills";<sup>1</sup> and, again, his words, "it is the House of Commons, not the House of Lords, which settles uncontrolled our financial system . . . I am a House of Commons man."<sup>1</sup>

At this important crisis, when it was evident that a decision hung in the balance calculated to affect a distant future, a well-armed Tariff Reform champion suddenly rode from retirement into the ring. He for a time dominated the scene and led the tourney with derring do. This redoubtable knight-at-arms was Lord Milner, bearing the motto "Keen but not unbridled" (*Acer non effrenus*), or, being interpreted, "Chamberlainite, not Confederate." In the parlance of chivalry, if others jousted well, he jousted best.

Of iron will and eminent abilities, Lord Milner had been famous in journalism, more famous at the Inland Revenue and in Egypt, and most famous of all as African proconsul. Yet these various occupations have possibly their weaker side. The imperial sometimes becomes the imperious proconsul. Civil servants readily claim, as their

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in House of Lords, Hansard, November 29, 1909, pp. 1147 and 1172.



appointed mission, to advise and to despise statesmen.

However that may be, during the latter half of 1909 Lord Milner, "a Tariff Reformer of a somewhat pronounced type,"<sup>1</sup> as he called himself, did marvels, or, at least, recommended them. At Poole, at Glasgow, in the House of Lords, at Huddersfield, at Cardiff, he urged on the peers against constitutional principles and the people against the people's Budget. This "old tax-gatherer," as he too modestly termed himself,<sup>2</sup> presented to the country an "alternative policy," and announced to the astonished and dismayed masses that by his plan of Tariff Reform "it would be quite easy to raise twenty millions."<sup>3</sup> He pointed out that the working classes had most to gain by it, and that "you have got to begin soon, or you may have no Empire to consolidate."<sup>4</sup> He added to this alarming intelligence a little later, at Huddersfield, that, as a substantial part of such duties "will be paid by the foreigner," they would not raise the cost of living, and would, in fact, "tend to increase the imports."<sup>5</sup>

But while Lord Milner was thus backing the Lords and was prepared to "damn the conse-

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Wolverhampton, *Times*, December 18, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> House of Lords, November 24, 1909, *Hansard*, p. 969.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Poole, *Times*, November 17, 1909.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Speech at Huddersfield, *Times*, December 18, 1909.

quences,"<sup>1</sup> the fateful word had gone forth. The decision had been arrived at for which all men looked. Mr. Balfour was led to Birmingham, and there at Bingley Hall Mr. Austen Chamberlain publicly, in his presence, read a letter from his father containing this epoch-making edict: "I hope the House of Lords will see their way to force a General Election."<sup>2</sup> The die was cast. The master had said.

Nevertheless, though, as early as September, the extreme Tariff Reformers had publicly triumphed, and the conclusion that the Lords would reject the Budget was thus practically foregone, the scene was high and the occasion memorable on what was destined to be, in substance and in essence, that last night of our ancient order and of the old House of Lords. From the spectacle of all that was powerful or historic banded in overwhelming strength on the thickly crowded benches for the performance of this unprecedented act, "the most stupendous act of political blindness that has been perpetrated,"<sup>3</sup> the mind irresistibly turned back to the days of the seventeenth century and to the fathers of the British Constitution.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Glasgow, *Times*, November 27, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated September 21, 1909, *Times*, September 23, 1909. The resolution "condemned the Budget" as "intended to postpone indefinitely" Tariff Reform.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Asquith, *Hansard*, February 21, 1911, p. 1746.

It was in the last hours of November, 1909. On that night the "Backwoodsmen" and "Wild peers" had already uttered their war-cries and had discharged their missiles. Withdrawn to a neighbouring knoll, they watched from afar, with contempt or amusement, the superfluous oratory of circumlocution.

First, wending his way from among the bishops to the table on the Government side of the House, the Archbishop of York, in balanced yet grave and even portentous language, implored his hearers to pause ere it was too late. Solemn as his predecessor Wolsey, "there is a handwriting on the wall" he said, "that the time is coming, if it has not come, when the whole position of a Second Chamber in the Constitution will be submitted to the judgment of the country." Lord Curzon of Kedleston, who had vied with Lord Milner in zeal for rejecting the Budget,<sup>1</sup> arose to reply to this formidable prelate.

Those who favoured rejection found an invaluable ally in that commanding orator and eminent statesman, who, on this occasion, greatly facilitated the course marked out by the Tariff Reformers. He recognised that "we are at the commencement of a long and arduous struggle," but that thereout would issue a reformed House

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Annual Register*, 1909, p. 224.

of Lords, to be constructed by the Conservative party.

Lord Crewe wound up the debate on behalf of the Government. "In tearing up the ancient charters, in removing the venerable landmarks, you are making a most tragic blunder." To incredulous patrician ears he pronounced it certain that the Government would next set itself to obtain "guarantees fenced about and guarded by the force of statute—guarantees which will prevent that indiscriminate destruction of our legislation of which your work to-night is the climax and the crown."<sup>1</sup>

It was all over. The Lord Chancellor rose with the Orders of the Day in his hand, and put the question as to the Second Reading of the Finance Bill. There was a storm of "Not-contents." The counter-cry of the "Contents" sounded faintly, scarcely more in volume than the rustle of the peeresses' gowns, or than the hum of the ushers as they jostled us.

The division was duly challenged, and "Clear the bar" was ordered from the Woolsack. The teeming "Not-contents" swarmed to their lobby, as Birmingham had decreed that they should. The scanty handful of "Contents" looked rather wearily around them over their empty benches, to see what possible recruits would join them in the lobby. At

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, November 30, 1909, p. 1342.

that point a speculation arose among some of them as to the vote of Lord Peel.

Lord Peel registered, against the rejection of the Budget, a vote which he afterwards told me was the most judicious of his life. He was familiar with the Constitution, and would not violate its sanctity, for he had been Speaker of the House of Commons. Nor would he consent to be the instrument of Tariff Reform policy, for he was the son of Sir Robert Peel.

## CHAPTER VI

### TARIFF REFORMERS AND THE LORDS

THUS, at the close of 1909, the Tariff Reformers, to whom Free Trade was obsolete pedantry or a forgotten shibboleth, had now assumed, and acted upon the assumption, that the constitutional doctrines of Pym, Selden, and Somers, of Chatham and Russell, and even of Mr. Balfour himself, were mere exploded antiquarianism too. For the first time in English history, the grant of Ways and Means for the whole supply and service of the year—a grant made at the request of the Crown to the Crown by the Commons—had been intercepted and nullified by a body, powerful indeed, but admittedly disqualified from increasing or diminishing one single tax, or from proposing a substitute for any one of them. An immediate dissolution was inevitable.

The motive-power behind this action of the Upper House was patent. The Tariff Reformers

had reckoned on the collapse of Free Trade finance in the 1909 Budget. The opposite had happened, or would happen, unless they could destroy that measure. But it had passed the Commons. As an ultimate expedient, the House of Lords must be mobilised against it. It may be imagined whether Birmingham cared much for the genuine interests of the House of Lords. But the peers could be usefully employed in forcing a General Election; for, in an election, it was evident that, after the collapse of 1906, many normally Conservative seats would revert to Tariff Reformers, who might even very possibly win altogether. Six years of agitation had run on; campaigns are arduous and wasteful; nothing could be lost, and much might be gained, by an appeal to the country. The moment for Tariff Reformers was here and now.

In this intrepid argumentation it was difficult, or even impossible, for Mr. Balfour not to acquiesce. He had yielded so much before. Besides, the Tariff Reformers had recently accumulated a strong case against him. He had assured them of the breakdown of Free Trade economics, and his forecast had been proved unfounded. Had he meant to play with them? None knew. But unless he were to forfeit their confidence for ever, he must now repair his error by orthodoxy of the strictest kind.

It was in these circumstances that this noble victim had been led in September to Bingley Hall, where Mr. Chamberlain's mandatory epistle had been recited to the assembled worshippers. Garlanded with cheers, and filleted with approbation, he had been drawn in leash by Mr. Austen to the sacrifice.

And yet—if the facts guide aright—he could surmise already that the position in which he stood could still possibly admit of escape. Time could proffer many alternatives to practical action, and the course of politics could supply opportunities in plenty to one who watched closely the sequence of affairs. The wide theatre of events had for him a safety curtain and emergency exits.

In plain fact, the dilemma of his security was this. On the Lords throwing out the Budget, an election would inevitably follow. If, as the result of that election, Tariff Reform won, then his course was fairly plain. For, on that hypothesis, the country itself would have practically condemned Free Trade, and he would have no option but to execute its decision, however genuinely indisposed he might be to come to fiscal business. If, however, in the alternative, Tariff Reform did not win, then clearly his turn would have been not indifferently served also. For, in that case, the blessed postponement of action would be



obligatory, and further—and here was a definite ray of hope—a constitutional crisis as to the future of the House of Lords would thenceforth dominate the whole sphere and circuit of politics, to the utter extinction, during at least another year, of any necessity for Tariff Reform. Another year of ticket-of-leave from the Birmingham authorities!

It was thus logically certain that, whatever happened at the coming election, Mr. Balfour would not be wholly at a loss. If his party won, Tariff Reform would be, as it were, forced upon him by the country. If they did not win, as they scarcely could,<sup>1</sup> in view of the huge existing majority against them, Tariff Reform would not be in practical politics, and he would be at large. Nevertheless, he was now definitely in the bad books of his party. Therefore, to efface this unfortunate impression, and to make clear that he was a devoted Tariff Reformer, was, to judge from the concordance of his utterances, his dominating note during the latter half of 1909.

In the first place, he warmly eulogised Lord Lansdowne, as “amply justified” in turning down the Budget,<sup>2</sup> thus endorsing his own doctrine. For the country had to face “a long-drawn con-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Annual Register*, 1910, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, November 18, 1909.

spiracy," organised by "single-chamber conspirators." It was necessary to defeat this "plot."<sup>1</sup>

It was even more significant when Mr. Balfour announced himself a Tariff Reformer, practically *sans phrase*. He had a "vehement faith" that the choice now lay between Socialism and Tariff Reform, and that we must select the latter.<sup>2</sup> He eulogised "that security which I believe judicious Tariff Reform will give." As regards Tariff Reform hurting the cotton trade, "I do not believe a word of that." "I have always dissented from the economic views of Mr. Cobden."<sup>3</sup> But really, the climax and summit of his Protectionist enthusiasm was reached in December, on the occasion of the issue of his election address. "That Tariff Reform will stimulate home industry seems to me a truism"—"only by Tariff Reform can you hope to retain Colonial Preference"—"it is the first plank in the Unionist programme." In conclusion he wrote, with reference to the problems of the day: "no substantial advance can be made towards the solution of any one of them, till a change of Government takes place, and a party is returned to office prepared to press through to the utmost of its force the policy of Tariff Reform."

<sup>1</sup> Election address, *Times*, December 11, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, September 23, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Manchester, *Times*, November, 18, 1909.

Therefore, when at the opening of February, 1910, the smoke and dust of the General Election had dissipated, things were not very critical from Mr. Balfour's point of view. His party was stronger and had won many seats, though still in opposition. The constitutional question of how to deal with the House of Lords filled the entire vista of immediate politics, to the exclusion of Tariff Reform. There was, however, one anxiety, and that not a slight one : the men with, and around, him were more Tariff Reform than ever. Theirs seemed a permanent cause, and their appetite had been only sharpened by inordinate disappointments. Once the constitutional question was cleared from the scene, he must dispense to them the spoils of victory ; they would brook no further failure, or even procrastination. By his election address of December, 1909, he had committed himself too deeply ever to draw back again. Should he attempt it, the Cimbers and Cinnas of protection would not stay their hands.

Thus in truth, beneath the comfort and satisfaction of the situation, lay anxiety ; 1909 had been his 1814. He had suffered a serious reverse, and his escape had only been made good with difficulty. Early in the year his policy of "broadening the base" had crumbled, amid the dismay of his followers ; later, as if to redeem his compromised authority, he had filled the forum with protestations

of indubitable homage and unreserved allegiance to Protection. So he had his respite, and they would not slay.

At the very opening of 1910, and during the actual course of the elections, Mr. Balfour continued to commit himself more wholly than ever to Tariff Reform. "In every country where Tariff Reform has been applied," he said, "it has been followed by increases both in the home trade and the import trade—in other words, you make the country a greater productive instrument—you increase the total of the income there is to distribute." Therefore, Tariff Reform would "increase, and greatly increase, employment for the working classes of this country."<sup>1</sup> This was Protection in its crudest shape. But, after the elections had closed, it was evidently high time to retreat from this too forward position, and such was, in fact, his general course during the first half of 1910.

With earnest Tariff Reformers now panting hard on his track, the constitutional crisis raised by the action of the House of Lords came as a godsend. He put all his force and all his weight into enlarging upon the dreadful nature of this admirable red herring. Already, in February, the country was informed that they had got to deal with a "frankly revolutionary Government,"<sup>2</sup> quite as much as, if

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Hanley, *Times*, January 5, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Constitutional Club, *Times*, February 23, 1910.

not more than, with Tariff Reform. In March he enlarged on the necessity of other measures, "whether you take Tariff Reform or not as your future policy." In April, at the Albert Hall, and before suspicious habitations of the Primrose League banner-men, practically nothing at all about the great topic. Instead, much concerning Cabinet controversies, and the Irish Nationalists, and the position of the Sovereign, and two Chambers or one. The interstices and the lacunæ were garnished with warnings about "countless other revolutions" imminent. The Government were predatory bands; it was lunacy done cynically; their proposals were flagitious, violent, and unscrupulous; "if I could think of stronger language on the spur of the moment I would use it now."<sup>1</sup> Stronger language! What they needed to know was about the bacon tax or the wheat tax. He had recently written recommending that the proposed duty on Colonial wheat should be abandoned.<sup>2</sup> Would the tax on foreign wheat "go" next? Meanwhile, in the House of Commons Mr. Austen Chamberlain had been complaining that all this talk about the Constitution meant the shelving of "social" reform.

And then, in the midst of all these orations of

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Albert Hall, *Times*, April 27, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mr. Courthope, dated April 15, 1910.

postponement and of indifference, and while men began again to be convinced of his disinclination, there came this reassuring and consolatory thunderbolt: "I am, as you all know, a strong Tariff Reformer." <sup>1</sup> Such was the latest and most explicit of his announcements.

During the earlier part of 1910, therefore, the constitutional question of the House of Lords easily swelled to such a proportion as to exclude Tariff Reform from the public eye. Further, on the death of King Edward VII, the Conciliation Conference was arranged in June between the heads of the two parties in the State, and this conclave, with its numerous secret sessions lasting into November, also acted wonderfully well as a screen. For the chief was for ever vanishing behind a sliding panel into a council-chamber whither no one could follow him. The Conciliation Conference was the Boscobel oak of the fugitive prince of Conservatism.

Nevertheless, in spite of this, the latest among so many postponements, it soon became apparent that some further expedient must be held in view. For the rank and file were not so enthusiastic upon the salvation of the House of Lords as willingly to consent that for its sake Tariff Reform should be huddled away into outer darkness. They were too eager on the scent to be put off thus for long. And

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Whitehall Rooms, *Times*, April 26, 1910.

besides, the time might be coming when the constitutional question might be adjusted, and then Tariff Reform would be again to the fore, claiming indisputably and inconveniently the pride of place.

It was in these circumstances that Mr. Balfour made what was really his last turn in this ever-quickening chase. But it was of a nature so bold, and simple, and sudden, of such ingenious tactics, and so brilliantly conceived, that it must be reckoned almost a classical case. It had to do with the Referendum.

In order to appreciate all the bearings of this novel and final departure, it is necessary to fall back somewhat, so as to institute a brief survey of a political movement which had originated in 1907, or earlier, in the House of Lords, and which had by this time assumed prominence.

As long ago as 1874,<sup>1</sup> and later in 1884, and again in 1888, Lord Rosebery, who once described himself as a retired raven croaking on a withered branch, had vainly advocated the reform of the structure of the House of Lords. In the latter year, Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, himself handled the question, and rather lukewarmly produced two Bills, one of which might be termed a "black sheep Bill." But the black sheep, unlike their prototypes of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Report of Select Committee on the House of Lords, December 2, 1908, Appendix A.



nursery rhyme, declined in this instance to proffer their "three bags full," and, after a further futile essay, initiated in 1889 by Lord Carnarvon, the question slept until 1907.

In that year, Lord Newton, the Lucian of the House of Lords, introduced a measure of re-organisation, on the threefold ground that few peers attended the debates and divisions, that influential classes of the community were unrepresented, and that there was a standing and excessive predominance of one party in that House. He analysed their Lordships into "qualified" peers, and peers "redundant"; into "reluctant" or "caged-eagle" peers. Indeed, so microscopic was his dissection that he even had an eye to the "middle-aged caged" peer.

Lord Newton was sympathetic and comprehensive. For instance, he embraced in his scope the case even of that anomaly, the "unrepresentative" peer, the castaway of our political system. It may be said in passing that this genus of peer is of rare interest. He is in the melancholy position of being neither fully peer nor fully people. He is the Robinson Crusoe of the British Constitution, having been heartlessly marooned, in some outlying region of Britain, by the ship of state.

The Bill of Lord Newton had, however, a balancing defect. The "qualified" peers—that is,



those who were to constitute his new reformed House—were catalogued in a schedule. This seemed to be an error, not of strategy, but of tactics. The consignment of the patrician order to this schedule seemed to cast an irresistible air of littleness, of disproportion, over the whole plan. It was calculated to raise a titter that the immemorial peerage of England should be relegated to a legislative postscript. But in the House of Lords a titter is destructive, and the Bill was dead.

Yet although the Bill of Lord Newton sank plumb beneath the waters, it left an important survivor, or, at any rate, a buoy to mark its place in history. For a Select Committee of the House of Lords was at once appointed to consider suggestions "for increasing the efficiency of the House of Lords," and so forth. This Committee met in June, 1907, and finally presented its Report in December, 1908. It consisted of 25 members, of whom the overwhelming majority were Conservative. Its Report was of a remarkable nature, and requires attention.

The Committee was to some degree of a leisurely disposition, for though its deliberation, according to its Report, was "long and anxious," yet it proceeded on the principle that it was "neither necessary, nor expedient, to hear any evidence." Its conclusions, however, were of a sufficiently

startling nature, and even revolutionary, considering those who composed its membership. In substance, it recommended that "the dignity of a Peer and the dignity of a Lord of Parliament should be separate and distinct." Existing hereditary peers were to elect 200 from among their number to sit and vote as Lords of Parliament. Added to these were 130 "qualified" peers. Also, the Crown was to be "empowered to summon annually four Peers for life as Lords of Parliament," up to the number of no more than 40. There was to be constituted what Lord Lansdowne described later as "a kind of inner House of Lords."<sup>1</sup>

This Report was striking, not merely for its proposals, but for an air of scarcely suppressed mirth diffused over the whole. It abounded in such saws and axioms as that "permanent peerages do not by any means imply permanent politics"; "it seems contrary to public policy that it should be possible for persons to hover between the two branches of the Legislature"; "the possession of a life peerage does not render the holder less liable to the weaknesses of humanity, such as old age, or even to the accidents of humanity, such as those connected with pecuniary embarrassment." Strange—this self-critical levity, this half-smothered amusement.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Lord Morley in the House of Lords, Hansard, March 14, 1910, p. 177.

These masons were chuckling audibly to each other as they plied their trowels high up among the scaffolding of the Constitution.

Whence this mysterious masonic merriment? The reason is not far to seek: it arose not obscurely out of the nature of the Report itself. In external appearance, and at first sight, these proposals were in the nature of self-abnegation. The peers seemed to declare, as Lord Newton put it: "The melancholy fact is—a lot of us have got to go."<sup>1</sup> And they appeared to go willingly; so much so, indeed, that Lord Curzon described it later as "a voluntary act of self-renunciation without any parallel."<sup>2</sup> But to those who could look as far beneath the planking as could the masons in question, it was much otherwise.

For the recommendations of the Report, if adopted, would at a blow evidently cut down to insignificance one of the most valued and potent prerogatives of the Crown, that of making peers. This "inner House of Lords," once practically freed from the curb of this prerogative, and already possessed of the veto on legislation, could henceforth with scarcely restricted facility defy the Crown and the Commons alike.

It is noticeable that, although this Report was published at the end of 1908, no action was taken

<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, Hansard, November 17, 1910, p. 742.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 721.

upon it during 1909. Perhaps it was enough that the House of Lords, which had amended to death the Education Bill of 1906, and had altogether rejected the Licensing Bill of 1908, should in 1909 have turned out the Budget. In 1910, however, the Report of the Committee which had long seemed defunct, started suddenly to life again. In March of that year a resolution was proposed that "the possession of a peerage should no longer of itself give the right to sit and vote in the House of Lords." This was, in effect, to move for the establishment of the aforesaid inner House, and the motion was carried, on March 22, by an immense majority.

This action upon the part of the peers gave rise to a caustic commentary from Lord Morley: "You first of all commit homicide by slaying our Budget, and then proceed to commit suicide by denouncing yourselves as entirely unfit to have done the very thing that you did."<sup>1</sup> For, in fact, during the election of January, the peers had justified their action on the ground that their assembly was the ark of the constitutional covenant. Yet now, in the words of a peer, this resolution was a confession to a large extent of their own unworthiness, and an admission that a number of them were unfit to be legislators.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, Hansard, March 14, 1910, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Killanin, House of Lords, Hansard, March 21, 1910, p. 435.

Lord Curzon, as mentioned, explained that this bewildering metamorphosis was a "voluntary act of self-renunciation without any parallel." This was, perhaps, to pitch the matter too high. It is, indeed, the fact that the age in which we live appears to be one of repentant aristocracy. But the repentance in this case was rather for omitted, than for committed, sins. It was a repentance tempered, too, by the resolution to have in future not less, but more, capacity for peccadilloes. If there was "renunciation," it was of existing encumbrances.

As the year proceeded, the Lords seem to have grown more enamoured of their March resolution. For, in November,<sup>1</sup> they carried it again in the words "that in future the House of Lords shall consist of Lords of Parliament," to be chosen according to the plan detailed above. As the governmental peers did not interest themselves in this repetition of the performance, the resolution this time was carried unanimously.

The extraordinary position had thus been arrived at that the peers, by the Report of their Committee at the close of 1908, and by two resolutions in 1910, had practically indicted their own order as improperly constituted for legislation, and had, by implication sometimes, and sometimes by direct

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, November 17, 1910, p. 758.

affirmation, declared themselves unsuited to modern needs. At the same time, they had provided for themselves a scheme giving them more real power than before.

Meanwhile, Mr. Balfour, in his public utterances, had been keeping track of these proceedings very closely. In April he followed, willingly and heartily to all appearance, in the train of the resolution of March. And, as so often before, he found arguments for the scheme already adopted by his followers of so much more able a character than they themselves could find. Instead of making declarations detrimental to the House of Lords, as the peers had done, he argued strongly in their favour. That House had acted with tact, courage, and judgment. It had been the "anxious, responsible guardian" of great causes. Then, as soon as his hearers must have asked themselves, Why reform it so radically? the consummate dialectician, the generalissimo of paradox, resolved the involutions of the knot that himself had tied: "I will tell you . . . you must strengthen it . . . not with the view of modifying the kind of policy which the House of Lords has hitherto adopted, but with the view of enabling it more effectually to carry out its duties."<sup>1</sup> And again in November at Nottingham, on the same day as the Lords passed their resolution

<sup>1</sup> Speech at De Keyser's Hotel, *Times*, April 14, 1910.

for the second time, he applauded the action of the Upper House, and, reciting the gist of its reform policy, declared that this was "as I desire to see it reformed."<sup>1</sup> He thus, as it were, clenched their action upon them, and stamped it with his express approbation.

Meanwhile, however, some criticisms were being directed upon the character and method of the reform thus indicated, criticisms of so important a nature that it was impossible for the peers not to reckon with them and obviate them, so far as might be possible, by further action. The main question of the time was not, in reality, the inward structure of the House of Lords but its outward relationship to the House of Commons, and its position in the British Constitution. Therefore, all these hurrying architects were engaged upon a secondary and subsidiary matter in setting the pick-axes and the gelatine to work upon the old building, when all the time the solicitors were pointing out that no work could be undertaken until the legal question of "ancient lights" had been settled with their powerful neighbour at the other end of the long corridor of the Palace of Westminster. And it was all the more difficult to avoid this issue when Mr. Balfour himself was insisting upon it from the very first, or, at any rate, as early as February.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Nottingham, *Times*, November 18, 1910.



“What is,” he asked, “under a modern democracy, the main function of a Second Chamber?” The answer to his own interrogation was that it is to secure an “appeal from your First Chamber.”<sup>1</sup> It was plainly futile for the peers to restrict themselves to the mere programme of structure, in face of such utterances as these. The more urgent question was that of the relations of the two Houses.

This was the reason why Lord Lansdowne now proposed his policy of Joint Sittings of the two assemblies to settle deadlocks.<sup>2</sup>

To this further proposal, which now approached the region of practical politics, there was, however, an obstacle of a serious nature, which really sent back this method into limbo for the time. The method of Joint Sittings did not touch the core of the difficulty. “Remember, the whole thing only comes into operation when you have a Liberal majority in the House of Commons. When a Tory majority is there the whole machinery falls into abeyance.”<sup>3</sup> Mr. Balfour, who, again, approved of Joint Sittings, could only argue, in anticipation of this objection, that the policy of Joint Sittings should apply to “small” occasions, whatever that

<sup>1</sup> At the Constitutional Club, *Times*, February 23, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard, November 23, 1910, p. 838.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Asquith at Hull, *Times*, November 26, 1910.



meant.<sup>1</sup> Evidently, therefore, Joint Sittings, apart from the fact that thereby the peers might regain more power than ever, had to give way before the logic of facts to something else more radical and even revolutionary. Thus, step by step, with all the dramatic irony of a classical drama, those who, in 1909, had broken the Constitution by throwing out the Budget, were being impelled into courses of which they had not dreamed. And Mr. Balfour, half guide and half follower, moved with them step by step all the long and dangerous route.

It was under the stress of this weight of antecedent actions that, on November 23, Lord Lansdowne moved in the House of Lords that "if the difference [between the two Houses] relates to a matter which is of great gravity, and has not been adequately submitted for the judgment of the people it shall not be referred to the Joint Sitting, but shall be submitted to the electors by Referendum." The Lords, the Government party abstaining, passed this unanimously. The head of the Tariff Reform League rose at once in his place to say, "I for one am delighted to support it."<sup>2</sup> Two days later, the leader of the Tariff Reformers in the Commons affirmed it by formal resolution at Glasgow.<sup>3</sup> Four days after

<sup>1</sup> Nottingham, *Times*, November 18, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Ridley, Hansard, November 23, 1910, pp. 884-5.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Austen Chamberlain at Glasgow, *Times*, November 26, 1910.

that arrived the approbation of Mr. Balfour. Speaking with reference to deadlocks between the two Houses, Mr. Balfour declared that "the Referendum, as Lord Lansdowne proposed it, completely settled the question—it did give a key upon that deadlock."<sup>1</sup>

Only a few months before Tariff Reformers had been objecting, for some reason or another, to the very rumour of this plan. According to one authority, it was at that date "fantastic and preposterous," and, indeed, "exquisitely humorous." According to another, it was "a clumsy and inept suggestion, the suggestion of Radical-Socialist despair," and "a new revolution." "Its introduction would work a revolution in our Constitution for which there is no parallel." This "revolution" was now embraced with fervour by these citizens. The House of Lords, the Tariff Reformers, the Conservative party had suddenly fallen in love and run off with Democracy, that excellent domestic lady properly married to Liberalism. Don Juan, had he heard of it, would have died of envy.

It was at this point and in these circumstances that Mr. Balfour took his memorable step.

As 1910 had proceeded, Mr. Balfour, it is to be observed, had publicly laid aside that relative indifference to Tariff Reform which had charac-

<sup>1</sup> Albert Hall, *Times*, November 30, 1910.

terised some of his utterances earlier in the year. Whether owing to pressure exercised upon him from Birmingham, or to his own spontaneous inclination for that policy in the abstract, or possibly in preparation for his coming *coup-d'état*, he had now veered round definitely into the spirit of his April utterance that he was "a great Tariff Reformer."

Thus, in November, at Nottingham,<sup>1</sup> he declared that "every class must gain by Tariff Reform." He went on to point out that "it will not increase the price of living of the working classes." For this there were two reasons. First it was "ludicrous to suppose" that, when they had put their duty on foreign wheat "the cost of bread can be increased by any appreciable amount. That is not my belief." Next, the duty which they had in view "must expand those great fields of wheat supply, unlimited in amount, largely situated within the Empire, from which wheat will come in free." Then the great Tariff Reformer waded deeper into the flood. "I go further, and, I say, grant for the sake of argument that the price of bread, we will say, is increased—it shall not increase the cost of living to the working man." This was "the pledge I give on behalf of the party which for the time being I represent." They would effect this by

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Nottingham, *Times*, November 18, 1910.

reducing other taxes. Therefore, no matter how much the duty on corn "may increase the price of bread, no working man, or woman, shall suffer thereby." And yet there are those who have argued that Mr. Balfour never committed himself to a wheat tax!

This Nottingham speech appears to have completely conciliated the Tariff Reformers, for the moment, at any rate. It was so earnest, explicit, and even enthusiastic for all their policy. Mr. Chamberlain himself at once wrote from Highbury: "My dear Balfour, I have just finished reading your speech at Nottingham. I need not assure you that I am in the most cordial and complete agreement with you on all points." <sup>1</sup> Hence by definite assurances he had appeased, and had acquired grace, for the time at least, in the eyes of the authoritative party whom it seemed to be ever his disposition to conciliate.

Therefore, on November 29, 1910, just a year after the Lords had thrown out the Budget, there was held in the Albert Hall one of the most historic meetings which Tariff Reformers were likely to celebrate, or had celebrated since the "raging, tearing propaganda" of 1903. Earlier in the day Mr. Chaplin had protested that he had never known

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated November 18, 1910, published in the *Times* of November 21, 1910.

the Unionist pack in better trim. Another General Election had already been announced for December, but a new confidence, it was said, was heartening all ranks and sections of the overwhelming host that crammed the auditorium, and blackened or whitened the periphery from floor to roof. They were to act offensively, not defensively, henceforward. Had not Mr. Balfour promised it at Nottingham ?

For two whole hours previously hot siege had been laid to the doors of the Albert Hall, and the worn officials of the Metropolitan Division of the National Union had fought like knights banneret, or eke knights harbinger, to keep the charging mob of Tariff Reformers at bay. "Ladies," says the concise report, "suffered." Yet at last the survivors of the patrician *mêlée* were accommodated in the grand tier boxes, whence "their evening cloaks supplied a pleasing rim of colour." "Rule, Britannia!" was sung, and then, as the hero of the day was marched in under escort, the audience rose in its entirety and formed "two towering walls of spectators"—such was the elevating power of the occasion. The walls subsided, and profound "seriousness" reigned at once in the tense assembly, for the great statesman, it was observed, wore a "grave demeanour." Yet soon all went joyously and in the spirit of glad confidence, for, after all, the chief had recently proclaimed his definite allegiance to the wheat tax, and had received

the certificate and testamur, "cordial and complete," of Mecca.

And he began so well, about the Irish Loyalists, and the Veto Conference, and the Government and the Lords! "I always smile in spite of myself," he said, when he thought that Ministers on the other side could be regarded as "self-respecting," and this sally was received with cheers and laughter. Then he came to the main theme, to deadlocks between the two Houses, and to the Referendum as a means of solving them. "It is very amusing what our Radical friends say to the Referendum . . . they are horribly embarrassed." He thought that it was most entertaining, and thereat more laughter and cheers. However, they must "not be too unkind to the Government. We must not require of them too rigid an adherence to the principles of political logic." The Government had asked him whether, since he favoured the Referendum, he would submit Tariff Reform to the Referendum: "they think that they have put me in a hole, but they haven't." How satisfactory! No hole but had its loophole for the chief!

And then, at last, after this prologue, so punctuated with cheers and laughter, the great disclosure that was to be his doom, "the betrayal" as those who now cheered him were to call it presently, when their eyes had been opened by the Birmingham oculists.

“Nevertheless, I frankly say that without question Tariff Reform is a great change. I admit that this election, or any election, perhaps—certainly this election—cannot be described as taken upon Tariff Reform simply. But I have not the least objection to submit the principles of Tariff Reform to Referendum.”

This sentence, the report avers, was scarcely finished when the audience rose to its feet in a tumult of cheering. It is said also that there were cries: “This has won the election.”

How the chief actor in this high comedy must have smiled at the tumult and the tempest, nay, must have rocked with inward laughter, “in spite of myself.” For in that single utterance he had hoisted them all sky-high with their own Referendum petard. Dazzled by the suddenness of it all, they now cheered wildly and blindly. But to-morrow they would be seeing, and saying, that his new policy had drowned Tariff Reform and Tariff Reformers fathoms deep in futurity, and that therefore “Balfour must go.”

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FALL OF MR. BALFOUR

IT was some little time before the Tariff Reformers of the rank and file, who had applauded so lustily at the Albert Hall, began to awake to realities, to repent them of the tornado of their own cheering, and to perceive that their leader had once more endeavoured to banish their pet policy to a dim and distant prison-house.

It is true that one of their leading organs, just before the "betrayal," had denounced the Referendum policy as "a dodge to sweep Lancashire and win the election," and had declared that "if Tariff Reform cannot be carried into law without a Referendum, then no other large proposal ever can be, representative government is finished, and, incidentally, the Unionist party breaks into fragments." But such hard sayings take time to digest.

So, in spite of this, the rank and file welcomed the new move on the spur of the moment. It had seemed so audacious, so cleverly introduced



as a counter-stroke to Radical inquiries, and so vastly ingenious, that their opponents, already "horribly embarrassed," would not know what to do in face of such triumphant democracy. And they were all the more certain of themselves when they read the next morning the usual cantata, crossed only here and there by a discordant note. The "dodge to win the election" was highly approved on that very ground. It was written in high quarters that Mr. Balfour's lead was "great." "The effect of Mr. Balfour's lead will be enormous. It does not alter a single point in Unionist policy. Yet it reduces all the food-tax literature and placards of the Coalition to mere waste-paper. It at the same time gives Tariff Reformers an infinitely better prospect. There is no dropping of the food-tax. Governments do not go out on a Referendum. And if the national ballot on the tariff did not succeed the first time, a Unionist government could simply stay in office and submit the question again."

In a word, it was fondly hoped that all Free Traders would now vote Tariff Reform, or Unionist. In that case, Tariff Reformers would secure a majority, and, once in office, would submit the food-tax to a Referendum. Even if beaten, "Governments do not go out on a Referendum," and they would "simply stay in office."

But, then again, cutting athwart this delightful prospect of official immortality, came that grim Calvinistic voice of the *Morning Post*, calling it all a "dodge." 'Twas a foul plot, it seemed, on the part of the Unionist Free Traders and Lord Cromer, to jockey Birmingham. It meant "the indefinite postponement of Tariff Reform. Let Tariff Reform candidates go straight ahead on their original course, refusing to be diverted into constitutional revolution at the bidding of Mr. Chamberlain's enemies." A sore imbroglio. How could plain Primrose League esquires, or even mailed knights meditating behind their morions, decide between dalliance with the fair dame Democracy, or duty with the Constitution, their affianced and lawful spouse?

This entanglement began gradually to resolve itself, and to straighten out before the troubled souls of Tariff Reformers. The more they pondered, the clearer it became that some one had blundered, and even much worse. For, in the first place, they remembered that when, on November 23, only a few days prior to Mr. Balfour's speech, Lord Lansdowne had moved for the Referendum in the House of Lords, there had been no idea of referring Tariff Reform to a Referendum. Lord Crewe, for instance, said that he understood that "a tariff is not to go to a Referendum"; while Lord Ridley himself, head of the Tariff Reform League,

had exclaimed, with indignant certainty: "surely the Referendum could not be put into practice in the case of measures which are in their essence purely financial."<sup>1</sup>

But there was a further portent which none could ignore. Birmingham was just now in course of sending many electoral messages: "No part of the kingdom has more to gain by Tariff Reform than Wales": "Ireland has more to gain from Tariff Reform than any part of the country": "No trade or district has more to gain by Tariff Reform than the Potteries": "The East London constituencies stand more in need of Tariff Reform than any others." Such were the symptoms of the universal interest of the central power in the fight. Yet no word, only a chilling and disapproving silence, as to this last escapade. That silence was enough.

Soon, however, what was negative and suggestive became positive and actual. In the words of Byron, there was "a long, low, distant murmur of dread sound." This emanated from Mr. Austen Chamberlain, and was the first authentic and authoritative indication of Mr. Balfour's approaching end.

At Darlington, on December 2, referring to Mr. Asquith's challenge to Mr. Balfour to submit Tariff Reform to the people, he said that he considered frankly that that was an unreasonable challenge.

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, November 23, 1910, p. 886.

He thought that there was no possible parallel between submitting a Tariff Reform Budget to the country and submitting a constitutional change like Home Rule to the country.<sup>1</sup> He was more explicit and condemnatory on December 14, at Buxton: "I tell you frankly that, like the rest of my colleagues, I had no original idea of suggesting that the Referendum should be applied to the Budget, and I should not myself have made the proposal. When, however, Mr. Balfour made it at the beginning of the election, I accepted the ground which he chose for the Unionist party to fight upon, and I said: "Be it so, with all its objections." I am not afraid of taking Tariff Reform directly to the judgment of the people; and I say for this election . . . that promise was made, and it stands for this election."<sup>2</sup> Here was indisputable witness that Mr. Balfour's new departure was disapproved of by Birmingham, and that they would repudiate it after the next election. Now, indeed, Mr. Balfour had cast his last bale, his ultimate offering, over the sledge into "the Unionist pack." Henceforward, when the next election was over and his party were once more beaten at the polls, he would stand unbefriended, undefended, indefensible, before it.

But what were the motives that thus animated the

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, December 3, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, December 15, 1910.

leading spirits among Tariff Reformers to reject the scheme of their nominal head? The position was that an election, from which they had emerged in a very large minority, had been held only a few months previously. It was therefore unlikely that the present election, which was to be fought largely on the constitutional question, among others, would yield them a majority. If beaten, and if Mr. Balfour's pledge were to be adhered to, they could not carry Tariff Reform even after the election after next, but would still be bound to submit it to the people by Referendum. That was hopelessly far away. If, in the alternative, they were about to secure a majority at this election, then how mischievous to commit themselves to a Referendum which would, in effect, mean another election at which they might lose all that they would gain now by victory, and at which Tariff Reform might be rejected for ever! According to this logical and irrefutable reasoning, Mr. Balfour's policy was simply a proposal to commit Tariff Reform to penal servitude for a long term, or even for life.

After this had imprinted itself on the minds of the more thoughtful Tariff Reform leaders, and presently on those of the rank and file, it was certain that they could never again confide their fortunes with any degree of safety to Mr. Balfour. He had practised the same thing too often during

the long seven years of his leadership since 1903. There had been the issue of the "Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade" followed by the "Two Elections Scheme." Next had come the Valentine letter, and fourthly, the suggestion of "broadening the base." Then had been advanced the method of flooding out Tariff Reform under the constitutional crisis, and, sixthly, the most brilliant and original move of all, the Referendum programme. Six plans in seven years for postponing Tariff Reform! It was too much. There could be no further respite. The law must take its course.

And yet, on reflection, even that necessary measure did not seem so easy of immediate execution, however surely it would have to be taken eventually. While Birmingham rowed after him, toiling in the trough of the seas, he was so debonair, so blithe, and so jocund in the darkening storm, yet so vigilant and resourceful a mariner withal. His pinnacle had already danced away on the freshening crest of the electoral waters, laden up to the gunwale with his pledges, and bound for big meetings, and bursting with Tariff Reform. Tariff Reform, he now stated in a new gust of enthusiasm, is "very dear to my heart." At Grimsby he waxed eloquent over his pledge to make living cheaper, or not more costly, to "diminish the cost of living to the working classes exactly in proportion to any-

thing which, from Tariff Reform or any other source, may fall upon them. That is the pledge I give. Is that an intelligible pledge? Can any one mistake its meaning? No. Very well, then first consider where we stand . . . you have the distinct pledge of those who lead the party which desires Tariff Reform." <sup>1</sup> As if statesmen can do one thing, and simultaneously pledge themselves to do another to undo it!

There was a further reason why they were quite unable offhand to rid themselves of their leader. He had prepared his ground too well on the constitutional question which was now uppermost. During the year which had passed since the Lords had thrown out the Budget, he had always moved step by step in their company. He had sanctioned their primary act of rejection; next, he had applauded their scheme of reorganisation and had closely associated himself with it; then he had advocated, in unison with them, the plan of Joint Sittings of the two assemblies; and, last of all, he and they had together proclaimed their adhesion to the Referendum. True, he had gone much farther at the last moment than the Tariff Reformers intended. They had never seen whither he and they were bent, or that he would spring upon them this deadly surprise of binding the millstone of

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Grimsby, *Times*, December 3, 1910.



the Referendum round the neck of Tariff Reform. But for the ordinary campaigner, still obtuse to the true vision of events, it would be too sudden if he were to be evicted now.

To crown all, they were in the throes of a General Election. No time that to court-martial and fusillade the commander-in-chief.

When the General Election of December, 1910, was completed, it was found that no change had taken place in the respective balance of parties. The Government was still in the ascendant as before, Mr. Balfour had brought them to their third defeat, and the voice of real mutiny began to rise in the ranks at this unexampled catalogue of disasters. Men began by asking that Mr. Austen Chamberlain should now take action by enforcing his claim against Mr. Balfour that the Referendum pledge merely held "for this election." If he could achieve that, the latter would have to go, and the course before Tariff Reform, which had been thus obstructed or rendered tortuous at the recent appeal to the people, would be clear once more.

But Mr. Austen Chamberlain was not expert enough at this moment to have his way. He had to stand down temporarily, and await his chance. It was agreed early in January that the Referendum could not at once be taken off; and,



accordingly, the following announcement was published on January 13: "An important meeting of the Unionist leaders was held in town early this week . . . the party will be inspired by unity of purpose in the new Parliament . . . the controversy with regard to the Referendum is now regarded by most of the influential members of the Unionist party as closed. It is agreed that the Referendum, and its applicability to Tariff Reform, are now part of the Unionist policy." <sup>1</sup> At the same time Mr. Balfour reiterated publicly that "I proclaim myself as a Tariff Reformer." <sup>2</sup> This was doubtless an easy concession made to his pursuers, who had agreed to spare him for the nonce, and to retain the Referendum.

In order finally to ease men's doubts and shorten long memories, it was at the same time authoritatively stated that "the notion that Tariff Reform is shelved was originally started by the Liberals!" "Those Unionists who find, or think they find, any menace to the cause in the Referendum are merely playing the Liberal game." Hence the "wholehoggers" of Birmingham were asked not to credit their senses and to submit themselves to be hypnotised thus. They were now invited in their trance to believe that the stern *Morning Post* was "a

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, January 13, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated January 9, 1911; see *Times*, January 12, 1911.

notion started by the Liberals," and that they themselves, in pressing for Tariff Reform *sans* Referendum, were of the same metaphysical quality.

Nevertheless, in spite of his clairvoyance and his endless dialectics, it was still evident that the fall of Mr. Balfour could not longer be delayed. He was finally conducted to it in that November, 1911, by three complex and intermingled events, all of which, so far as he was concerned, began and ended in the same months. They were, as it were, three forces which, originating apart, yet fused and merged into each other by some unknown cause, combined to carry him for a time triumphantly onward, and then drew him under in their recoil.

These three, in plain language, were called respectively Canadian Reciprocity, the House of Lords Reconstitution Bill of Lord Lansdowne, and finally the Parliament Bill of the Government. It is needful to deal briefly with each in turn, not indeed in their profounder import, but with strict and sole attention to their connection with, and bearing on, the fortunes of Tariff Reform.

In the latter half of this January, announcement was made of a Reciprocity Agreement arrived at between Canada and the United States.

To dwell at length upon the exact terms of this proposed arrangement is not necessary, beyond

remarking that it was for mutual tariff concessions and reductions, covering, on each side, a large number of articles of natural produce and a smaller number of manufactured articles. Having been only provisionally signed, it was necessary to have it ratified by the Legislatures of both countries; and, from the first moment of its public appearance in January, it became evident that it would not be carried without exciting the severest antagonism. Its fate was diverse on either side of the border.

In the United States it was so fiercely criticised that it did not pass the expiring Congress, and another Congress had to be convoked in extra session in April. All party ties seemed to dissolve in the presence of this much-debated measure, but nevertheless, the House, and then the Senate, were at length induced to enact it, and it was ratified on July 26 by the President.

In Canada its fortune was very different. From the date of the first discussion upon it on February 9 in the Canadian House of Commons, the normal opponents of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Government were reinforced by important seceders, and by the manufacturing interest, who much feared the spread of such principles. It was argued that Canada was too prosperous to need it; that trade would be upset; that the sure advent to power, at

an early date, of a Democratic Government across the border would imply a reduction of rates in any case, thus rendering it superfluous for the Dominion to make any concessions now; and finally, that this was all a stratagem to make Canada a mere business annexe of her gigantic neighbour. So there followed the keenest opposition in Parliament; a dissolution; and the wholesale defeat at the polls, in the closing period of September, of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Administration, involving, of course, the Reciprocity Agreement.

All this had a reverberation across the Atlantic. Here it attracted to itself much debate and partisanship, and aroused much misunderstanding. It intertwined itself, also, with the events now under survey, to the extent that it is necessary to touch upon its true character, relieving it, if possible, from the cloud of passion and the dust of time.

The terms of this proposed Agreement had been at once seized upon by our Tariff Reformers as "a great imperial disaster."<sup>1</sup> The position was assumed that the Empire was in imminent danger of breaking up, since Canada and the United States were preparing mutually to lower their tariffs, and to enter into closer trade relations. Besides, it was argued that the Preference which Canada had

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Balfour, Hansard, February 6, 1911, p. 58.

granted to our goods since 1897 would henceforth be seriously invalidated, if not swept away, now that there was a prospect of lowered duties being accorded to the United States. Early in February the tide of Tariff Reform attack was directed against Free Trade in the House of Commons, on the ground that Free Traders had led the Empire to ruin by refusing to grant Imperial Preference on wheat . . . "a disaster brought upon us entirely by the refusal of the Government and those who supported them, to listen to the long pleadings of Canadian statesmen over these many decades."<sup>1</sup> For, if that had been granted by now, then, so it was claimed, Canada would never have resorted thus to the arms of the United States. Mr. Chamberlain wrote that he was "more than ever convinced that without Preference we cannot hope to maintain and develop the unity of the Empire."<sup>2</sup> Thus, it was asserted that, by the neglectful folly of Free Traders, the Empire was practically undone.

Let us discern the true quality and worth of these propositions.

There was, to begin with, an obvious flaw in this argument for saddling upon Free Traders the break-up of the Empire. The Preference granted to us by Canada dated from 1897. During all the years

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Balfour, Hansard, February 6, 1911, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Tariff Commission, February 8, 1911.

from that date up to 1906 the Conservatives had been continuously in office. Why, then, had these imperialists done nothing during all that time to avert the imperial doom? And what of the recent adoption of the Referendum, a policy calculated for postponement, not for acceleration? Here was ample food for doubt as to the propriety of their accusation.

But, these considerations apart, was it true that the Preference which we enjoyed in the Canadian market would be invalidated by the Reciprocity Agreement? The Board of Trade gave figures. At that date we were selling £20,000,000 worth of goods annually to Canada. Of that trade, about two-thirds, or £13,000,000, received preferential treatment from Canada. Out of this only about £800,000 was affected by the Reciprocity Agreement. Of that £800,000 about £480,000 worth of British goods still retained a preference of a very substantial nature. That left a balance of about £320,000, or only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the British exports into Canada; and even on these goods the duties in the future would merely be identical with the duties on that class of goods coming from America. Thus the scare about the abolition of the British Preference was devoid of basis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Statement by President of the Board of Trade, Hansard, February 8, 1911, p. 311.

But what of the other scare about breaking up the Empire? Apart from the fact that Canada was about to reject the Agreement, the case is worth hearing as stated by its main author, Mr. W. S. Fielding, who also, it may be added, was the Minister mainly responsible for the Preference granted to us by Canada in 1897. "We had the idea—apparently some persons think it a strange one—that in promoting the extension of Canadian trade and commerce, and thus increasing the wealth and prosperity of the Canadian people, we were doing the best possible service to the national and political interests of the Dominion and the Empire. Surely a wealthy, prosperous, and contented Dominion is a greater strength to the Empire than one in less happy circumstances. I have never been able to get it into my head—I fear I shall not be able to do so now—that in endeavouring to open foreign markets to the products of my country I have been doing anything antagonistic to national or imperial interests."

"In association," he continued, "with his Majesty's Ambassador at Paris and a Canadian colleague I made a commercial treaty with France, for the purpose of obtaining the advantages of the French minimum tariff for the chief products of Canada. I never thought there was any disloyalty to the Dominion or to the Empire in that. Nobody



else thought so. With the authority and co-operation of my colleagues, I made a commercial Agreement with Germany, another with Belgium, another with Italy, another with Japan. I never thought that there was any disloyalty to the Dominion or to the Empire in any of these Agreements. Nobody else thought so. Why, then, should it be thought disloyal to try to obtain admission for Canadian products on favourable terms to the American market ?”<sup>1</sup>

There is a certain touch of humour to be recognised in what the Tariff Reformers now did. Forgetting that Reciprocity might, after all, be negatived on one side or the other of the border, and also that, after all, the whole subject of Free Trade between those two peoples, though of imperial interest, was not exclusively the affair of Birmingham, they raced in, eager to find a weapon to their hand with which to belabour our Free Trade Government. They claimed that Free Traders, in not granting Preference to Canada in time, had well-nigh ruined that beneficent policy of theirs. “Exit Imperial Preference !” was the cry, and loud was the lamentation : the mourners walked about the streets.

With a stroke of comedy not unworthy of

<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Hon. W. S. Fielding to the *Morning Post*, January 22, 1913.



Molière, it was none other than Mr. Balfour who, in dust and ashes, put himself forthwith at the head of this dismal cortège. "What are we to do in these circumstances?" he said. "Are we to haul down our flag? Are we to give up the battle in despair? Are we to say . . . that the whole case for Imperial Preference has gone? No, no—while there is life there is hope."<sup>1</sup> Thus the beau who, for eight years, by six different methods, had been busy jilting the sweet maid Preference, was now dramatically pointing to her half-drowned form at the Atlantic bathing-place, and was vowing that he would never desert her in despair. "While there is life there is hope." In reality, the cheerful Preference was merely taking a dip, and was disporting herself like other maidens of her quality at a watering-place.

But, in their undue hurry to hit Free Trade, some Tariff Reformers went even farther. Casting prudence and the recollection of their own arguments to the winds, they protested that Preference was not merely dying but was actually deceased. "The basis of Imperial consolidation must be reconsidered anew." "Without Canada there can be no Imperial Preference. But the breach in the Federal fabric is not past mending. Imperial

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Constitutional Club, *Times*, February 7, 1911.

Federation is not dependent on Imperial Preference or on any fiscal form. It is dependent on forces of race and blood"! But, if so, then what of Mr. Chamberlain's own axiom, which for eight years had ranged at large through our national politics, that "a system of Preferential tariffs is the only system by which the Empire can be held together"?<sup>1</sup>

Worse was to come at the opening of February. "Without Canada there can be no Imperial Preference. With Canada Mr. Chamberlain's propositions stand. Without Canada they fall." . . . "Tariff Reform has been defeated at three successive General Elections." "As so many Tariff Reformers have discovered to their surprise on visiting Canada, the people of the Dominion have recently not taken any practical interest in the proposal to give them a small Preference on wheat." No practical interest! Dead wheat tax! Thus, while Mr. Balfour was for not hauling down the flag, and for not surrendering to despair, and for hoping against hope, others were penning an eulogistic funeral notice, were performing the post-mortem, and were already reproaching the legates for their recent neglectful blindness to the warning symptoms of mortality.

As, however, copy-books say that good comes

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Constitutional Club, June 26, 1903.

out of evil, so unexpected benefit accrued out of all this to the Conservative chief. During several months the wave of Tariff Reform dismay at Reciprocity carried him safely upon its shoulder. For, obviously, the more they assumed Reciprocity to be destructive of Preference and of Empire, the less could they oust Mr. Balfour for being cold and indifferent in that latter cause. Indeed, he was now to the eye of the public more zealous than some of the elect themselves. While they had buried Preference with a funeral oration, he was busy praising it from the rostrum and vowing that its obsequies were not yet. While they had published its will, he was subsidising it with his eloquence. While the eagles swooped down as to a corpse, he was devotedly nursing it to life in hospital.

This respite, however, must needs terminate soon, and the laughing wave which now bore him onward was to leave him beached in September. At that date Sir Wilfrid Laurier fell. Mr. Balfour, as we shall see, had henceforward nothing left to protect him from the determination of his followers to liquidate the ever-lengthening arrears due to them. No further friendly circumstance presented itself to draw a veil over his "betrayal" of the previous year, as the forwards described it. So, in his fall, the Canadian assisted to drag

down the British statesman. Between Ottawa and Westminster there was Reciprocity—not of tariffs, but of resignations.

The second important event of 1911 which first uplifted, and then brought down, Mr. Balfour was the House of Lords Reconstitution Bill, introduced on May 8 in the House of Lords by Lord Lansdowne. Its history is also closely associated with that of Tariff Reform.

When, in 1909, the House of Lords threw out the Budget at the instigation of the extreme Tariff Reformers, it was found desirable or essential to emphasise the worth of that assembly. A school of artists then arose who drew a favourable and even flattering portrait of its merits, and perhaps it was Lord Curzon who, up and down the country, sketched the value of his order with the boldest hand. A sad place would England be, according to the orator, "if you get a country without any peers possessing territorial connections . . . if you have no country-houses in the possession of the old families . . . when you have no great parks, because they will all be cut up into allotments; when you have no eldest sons, because everybody will be a younger son in those days." <sup>1</sup> This was as dark as the land of Egypt when the firstborn were universally extinguished, doubtless to the detriment of the best society.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Lyme Hall, Disley, September 14, 1910.

But when once the House of Lords had served the ends of Birmingham, and when it had become expedient, after the two adverse elections of 1910, that it should be dissociated from Tariff Reform and put away from before its face, then the school was broken up, and the aforesaid style was changed. The Pre-Raphaelite picture of the peerage painted by the earlier virtuosos gave way to Post-Impressionism, to Futurism, and even to Cubism itself. In plain words, the House of Lords began to be represented at all sorts of new angles, and in cross-lights, and in warring colours.

To look through the dust of this artistic chaos, and to analyse the decay of a consistent tradition, it would appear that three Conservative sections gradually formed themselves. After the events of 1910 already recited, they combined and concentrated their powers in 1911 upon a House of Lords Reconstitution Bill, which measure, in spite of its external unity, may be judged, from the nature of its provisions, to have been the joint product of these three.

In the first place, there was the view, whether or not chiefly represented by Lord Lansdowne is immaterial, that the Lords, having thrown out the Budget, had been condemned by the country; and that therefore it was highly necessary to change its composition to meet the call of democracy. Next,

there was the idea, possibly in accord with the conceptions of Lord Curzon or Lord Selborne, that that assembly must still remain strongly entrenched in its rights and privileges, and must be even more inexpugnable than ever. Thirdly, there was Mr. Balfour's policy to be considered. He had recently staked his last throw upon the Referendum. If in this scheme the Referendum could be allowed for—well indeed for him. For then the Tariff Reformers could hardly change their leader for prescribing wrongly, if they could agree to adopt his chief proposal as their own.

Lord Lansdowne, then, in framing and introducing this Bill allowed for these several influences. It was to be a Chamber which, "while faithfully serving the democracy, will be strong enough to resist the gusts of passion and prejudice."<sup>1</sup> The democracy, it seemed, was to be faithfully served in many ways. "Not only this House must be no longer purely hereditary but no part or proportion of its members shall owe their right to sit and vote in it to heredity alone."<sup>2</sup> The Peers were to choose from themselves only 100 Peers, to be Lords of Parliament. Another 120 were to be voted for by electoral colleges composed of M.P.'s. Yet another 100 were to be appointed by the Crown, distributed between the two sides in

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, May 8, 1911, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

politics in proportion to the strength of parties in the House of Commons. As Lord Crewe briefly commented: "These proposals destroy the House of Lords." As Lord Morley said: "It comes to this, as the end of this grand move in November, 1909, against the House of Commons, that two-thirds of the members of the new House are to be in fact and in essence dependent on that House which you then defied." It was to this that Tariff Reform had led the leaders of the once Conservative party.

If, then, the democracy was to be gratified on the one hand, the Peers who would survive were to be consoled on the other. Even with a Liberal ministry in office, the Conservatives were to retain a working majority, and still more so if the Conservatives were in office. Also, the free creation of Peers by the Crown was to be abolished, that power which is essential to the old balance of the Constitution. Finally—and here Mr. Balfour's policy came in—Lord Lansdowne restated that he was ready that the Referendum should be employed in great matters on a difference arising between the two Houses. A few weeks earlier Lord Lansdowne had announced explicitly: "Referring to such a use of the Referendum as was suggested by Mr. Balfour in his memorable announcement at the Albert Hall last year, that pledge, of course, will be fulfilled whenever we have an opportunity of fulfilling



it.”<sup>1</sup> Would these pledges stand firm enough to save the House of Commons leader?

Mr. Balfour did not hesitate to express, at an early date, his approval of this measure. “We cannot improve, so far as I can see, upon the broad system of the House of Commons.” But he thought that the House of Lords could be ameliorated: “I want the Second Chamber of this country to be stronger.” “Lord Lansdowne has begun at the right end”;<sup>2</sup> and then he mentioned specifically and ratified the Reconstitution Bill.

Lord Lansdowne, in introducing these proposals, had referred to the singularity of his task. He even inveighed against it himself, terming it “a complete transformation of this House—a drastic interference with the privileges of individual peers—to some these proposals will almost present the appearance of a betrayal—a death-blow to the House of Lords as many of us have known it for so long.”<sup>3</sup> The objects of this “betrayal” not unnaturally listened with grim and gloomy hearts. Better Free Trade any day than this. Better open ports than a closed Second Assembly. This “inner House of Lords” would be for many a lethal chamber. Even Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George seemed reactionary

<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, March 28, 1911, p. 691.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Newcastle, *Times*, May 19, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> House of Lords, May 8, 1911, p. 233.



Jacobites compared with this impassive marquess ordering away their bauble like another Oliver.

Then, breaking through the restraints of immemorial allegiance and the deferential loyalty of transmitted feudalism, were heard in that stately assembly the rough tones of plain speech. Wrathful peers rose in turn to indict their leaders. It was flat mutiny, and even a *pronunciamento*. Prominent on the barricade could be noted Earl Bathurst and Lord Willoughby de Broke, the Duke of Northumberland, the Earl of Wicklow, Lords Raglan and Oranmore and Browne, Lord Killanin, and the Duke of Somerset.

To Lord Bathurst "any reform of the House of Lords would be most disastrous—this Bill would destroy the Constitution—this measure will abolish this historic House." Lord Willoughby de Broke declared that he would rather perish at the hands of the electors than at the hands of their Lordships. Lord Oranmore and Browne pressed to know why the noble marquess dealt a death-blow to the Lords Spiritual and Temporal of the realm. Lord Killanin called it "the condemnation, the irrevocable condemnation, of the House." Lord Raglan cared not whether he were termed "backwoodsman" or not. The Bill was an *olla podrida* of members; it was "the apotheosis of the Conservative agents' policy. . . . I have the strongest possible objection to being

executed. . . . I shall mount the tumbril with fortitude, but I shall not order the tumbril myself." <sup>1</sup>

After this, the Bill was unanimously read a second time on May 22, the Government refraining from calling a division. But, of course, it was dead. All the tedious rigmarole about qualifications, and electoral colleges, and Lords of Parliament, all the close-written vellum endorsed by these pious founders of a new establishment, were trundled away under cover of official darkness, far out of sight.

For Mr. Balfour, who had adopted this plan as his own policy only four days previously, this struck an additional note of doom. His last expedient, his Referendum, entangled in the meshes of the Reconstitution Bill, was gasping to death on the shore. Only a miracle could save him now. But Birmingham, marking his decline and anticipating his fall, could take a placid view. They at all events wanted nothing better than to discard the Referendum, and could contemplate without excessive sorrow a Lords Reconstitution Bill in convulsions. They must prepare for throwing overboard the cumbersome ballast of Mr. Balfour's Referendum. Then surely the balloon of Tariff Reform policy would jump upward once more into the blue.

The third, and the most important, element in these forces which were sweeping Mr. Balfour and

<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, May 17, 1911.

his policy away was the Parliament Bill. This measure was the inevitable rejoinder to the rejection by the Lords of the 1909 Budget. They had not calculated for the almost mechanical recoil and repercussion of that heavy ordnance wherewith, from 1906 to 1909, they had blown down the decisive measures of the Government and had definitely breached the Constitution. Now the Parliament Bill struck them high and low with the un contemplated limitation of their overstrained prerogative. But for Mr. Balfour it was more than this. For him it was a matter of political existence. If this Bill were placed upon the statute-book, his artillery would be dismantled and silenced, and all his campaign would collapse in one resounding catastrophe.

The proposal of the Government was made in February, and was the same in 1911 as it had been in 1910. In a word, it was the limitation of the veto of the Lords, and, as a result of the recent elections, it could count upon the support in the House of Commons of a majority of about 120.

It would be altogether unnecessary for the present purpose to trace the passage of this measure through the House of Commons—the first reading carried in February, the second in March, the Committee stage ended in the first week in May—the third reading voted on May 15 by a

majority of 121. That Mr. Balfour fought it as he had scarcely fought before goes without saying. Yet in spite of his uttermost efforts, at last, as in 1909, only the House of Lords could avert his fall. But surely, every motive would prompt the Second Chamber to reject the Parliament Bill. And yet again how could it take such action, seeing that it was itself committed to its own Reconstitution Bill, that is to say to "suicide"? It had specifically condemned the vast majority of its own members to political exile or death. Hence the Parliament Bill, after its passage down the long corridor and its arrival at the bar of the Lords, would find that its judge had performed *hari-kari*.

Having been read a first time in the House of Lords, the Parliament Bill came up for second reading on May 23, and the constitutional conflict was definitely set. Only the day before the Reconstitution Bill had been read a second time without division, "the death-blow" as its author himself had termed it.

Lord Rosebery now came forward "in the moment of dissolution" to utter, in his own language, "the final farewell." Having to choose between mending and ending that assembly, he was frankly an "ender." "I can see no use in prolonging the existence of this House as a useless sham." The old House of Lords had abdicated

and was dead. The backbones of the State—for the State, it seemed, had more than one backbone—were going or gone. Then he smote with his impartial rod the Tariff Reformers, tossing aside the folly of taxing bread, even in spite of “the counterbalancing freedom of tea.”

Lastly, with one of those shrewd thrusts that pierce behind the arras and impale secret things, he exclaimed that “it is one of the curses of the present situation that the future of our ancient Constitution, by the force and irony of circumstances, is inseparably bound up with what appears to the electors to be a tax on food.”<sup>1</sup> It was a touch of Ithuriel’s spear.

Lord Lansdowne in winding up admitted that “after the last two elections you have the right to legislate upon this question,” but reserved to himself and his colleagues liberty to move amendments. In this spirit the second reading was unanimously accepted.

In the succeeding Committee stage the work of amending the Bill began, and the process of “knocking the bottom out” of the measure was actively carried forward. On July 20 it was read a third time and returned to the Commons. On the same day the Prime Minister intimated that the House of Commons would be asked to disagree

<sup>1</sup> Speech in House of Lords, May 29, 1911, p. 930.

with the amendments, and that His Majesty had given his assent to the creation of Peers, if necessary, so as to carry the measure through the Lords.

This warning of a counterblow from the Government had a considerable and even a sensational effect. While the garrison of our upper fort were filling the moat, and hauling up the drawbridge, and boiling the lead in preparation for the assault, an army of aristocratic aviators suddenly threatened from the clouds. There was no use for bastions and barbicans, for the arrow or the arquebus, when any number of "dirigible" barons might volley or rocket from on high. All tactics in Chateau Gaillard were forthwith rendered nugatory by these prospective patricians, this posse of possible peers.

There was nothing for it but to call out the reserves of invective. This was, according to Mr. Austen Chamberlain, a "revolution nurtured in lies, promoted by fraud, and only to be achieved by violence."<sup>1</sup> To Mr. Balfour, who had already called the Parliament Bill "one of the most unscrupulous revolutions that any man has ever tried to carry through in this country,"<sup>2</sup> this present intimation was a "felon blow," "traitor's advice to the Sovereign," not to speak of a "political crime."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, July 27, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Newcastle-on-Tyne, *Times*, May 19, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Haddington, *Times*, October 9, 1911.

The announcement in question was dated July 20. On July 21 the Tariff Reform movement began to bear its latest fruit. The Unionist party in the House of Lords, one of the most solid and most coherent bodies that perhaps has yet appeared in our politics, on that day broke in two. Part recoiled in dismay from, part clung in desperation to, that perilous and disastrous course upon which in an evil hour for themselves their feet had been set. In the interests of Tariff Reform they had unhinged the Constitution, and they had now to decide whether to take, or "damn, the consequences." The former section, commonly called "Hedgers," were led by Lord Lansdowne, and favoured the acceptance of the situation, while the "Ditchers" were prepared to lay down their lives in the last ditch and to "damn the consequences" of the creation of 500 peers. The discord was bitter, and occasionally envenomed. *Nec color imperii, nec frons erat ulla senatûs.*

The "Ditchers" were swiftly organised under a redoubtable chief. Lord Halsbury had been called to the Bar in 1850, and rose easily, by virtue of his vast legal attainments, to be Lord Chancellor in 1885, a post which he occupied for seventeen years altogether. The Common Law of England has known in the nineteenth century no more consum-



mate master. His lightning intelligence could penetrate without effort into the most entangled problems, and what he solved thus easily for himself, he could as easily impress upon others by his caustic and irresistible exposition. The very by-products of his judicial mind were weightier than the considered judgments of other men. His asides were axioms, and his parentheses made precedents. But our modern Mansfield was also our political Eldon ; for there are more things in statesmanship than were ever dreamed of at Nisi Prius or at the Old Bailey Bar.

The second-in-command of this militia was Lord Selborne. He added to this function that of incumbent, or chaplain-in-ordinary, to the force, for he proclaimed that "it is our great task and privilege to preach the English Moses and the prophets," whether the prophets were popular or not.<sup>1</sup> The adjutant was the Nimrod of the Midlands, Lord Willoughby de Broke.

This split ran so clean through the party both in the Lords and in the Commons that it at once became obligatory on Mr. Balfour to declare himself, for the issue had forthwith to be settled, and was clear and unequivocal. But the dilemma was fatal ; to decide at all meant disaster for him either way.

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, July 13, 1911.



If he plumped for the "Ditchers," who to an overwhelming degree were Tariff Reform, that would, indeed, be not inconsistent with his general policy, and would put him in better odour with Birmingham. But, then, if he did so, and thus prevailed with the Lords to wreck the Parliament Bill, he was aware that the Government meant business, would create the Peers, and would carry their point. What a result for him, then, not only to be thus beaten, but to be the agent in creating a Liberal House of Lords!

In the alternative, he could side with Lord Lansdowne and the "Hedgers." Here the outlook was wellnigh as bad. In that case, the Bill would pass equally, and the "revolution," as he loved to term it, would be saddled on the State. On such a surrender after such a campaign, the mildest "Ditcher" would not think twice before repudiating him.

On the morning of July 26 Mr. Balfour declared for the "Hedgers." He shed a gentle ridicule on the "Ditcher" jargon about fighting to the last, and perishing not yielding. Was it relevant? There was no fighting to be done, and no real self-sacrifice in a vote. "I agree with the advice Lord Lansdowne has given to his friends; with Lord Lansdowne I stand; with Lord Lansdowne, I am ready, if need be, to fall."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter published in *Times*, July 26, 1911.

The response and the rupture came that evening at the "Ditcher" dinner to Lord Halsbury, where there was a memorable rally of Tariff Reform Confederates. The assumption of the latter was that the threat about the creation of Peers was all bluff. Perhaps, if they stood firm, there might be an election, in which the country would rally to support them and Tariff Reform would incidentally come to its own. "I heartily support the object" was the telegram of Mr. Chamberlain. That of itself was enough to settle that there was to be a definite breach with Mr. Balfour.

At the dinner Mr. Balfour was now merely mentioned with perfunctory "deep and sincere affection." But his policy was flouted. "If a peer's conception of duty," said Lord Selborne, "differs from that of his leaders, he must obey his own and not theirs." Lord Halsbury had "heard from my grandmother" not to indulge in military metaphors, as the chief had advised that morning, but "it would be better to avoid sneering suggestions of any kind!"

However, the sensational event of that night was the speech of Mr. Wyndham. The appeal of Mr. Balfour, he said, "did bring in the tragic touch. That touch of tragedy and the emotion it naturally engendered in men who loved their leaders served only to deepen their convictions and to confirm

their resolves" ! *Et tu, Brute!* The base of Pompey's statua was nigh.

August 10 was the day of the final division in the Lords. The Government, supported by some 35 "Hedgers," won by a small majority, and the Parliament Bill became law. Hapless "Hedgers" ! they were described as "the 35 traitors who have not scrupled to stab their best friends in the back . . . they have killed the House of Lords, the Church, and the Unionist party." This "ignoble train of Unionists" had seen fit to "slay their brethren in the fundamental cause of self," and were "branded as traitors and cowards," publicly. All this was doubtless intended to reach Mr. Balfour. It was the first rattle of the daggers which were now unsheathed.

Therefore, in the sombre November afternoon, at the melancholy office of the Executive Committee of the City of London Conservative Association, the last scene came. Mr. Balfour resigned his leadership.

On that evening his speech was very different from those halting harangues, uttered often in old days to restive Primrosers or to glum public audiences, in embarrassed eulogy of Tariff Reform. Now it was the philosopher, the statesman, who spoke.

With just pride and lofty reminiscence he

enumerated his long services in the State—his thirty-eight years of Parliament, his twenty of Unionist leadership, his ten of leadership of the House of Commons, “a longer period of continuous leadership of the House than that of any Minister since the death of William Pitt.” In the last twenty-five years he had been for seventeen a member of the Cabinet. Surely a closely packed record of life !

But History, the obituary muse, will not refrain from asking how it was that all this eminence and ability fell so easily at last before the “Ditchers” and the Halsbury Club. That inquiry is cogent and calls for an answer. But these pages have furnished the reason why.

On the retirement of Lord Salisbury, Mr. Balfour, the new leader of the Conservative party, was confronted with a new policy. He favoured, yet he feared, it. He favoured it so far as to place his power and prestige at its disposal ; he feared it so far as to magnify, or even to create, the obstacles in its path. For Tariff Reformers this was the feast of Tantalus.

Eventually, however, Tariff Reform, with its appetite thus whetted by Mr. Balfour himself, settled down to eat up his party, and the Caucus dined daily on Conservatism.

Therefore, when, in 1911, the final crisis declared

itself, the old prophecy of Randolph Churchill was fulfilled—only not of the Liberal party. It was the Conservative party, which in former days Mr. Balfour had so ably led, that had vanished. Birmingham had swallowed it and him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE POLICY OF MR. BONAR LAW

ON the occasion of Mr. Balfour's impending resignation of the leadership of his party, Birmingham very naturally came forward, in the person of Mr. Austen Chamberlain, to claim the reversion for itself. Already, in July, begirt by the faithful Ditchers at their famous feast, this statesman had been raised on their shields, and acclaimed as "our future Prime Minister." At that banquet he had said: "It may be a family defect; it may be an hereditary failing—'What I have said, I have said,' and I can none other." If the Ditchers were, on the one hand, naturally impressed by these allusions, on the other, when he proceeded to call the Prime Minister a "trickster," they must have felt him to be their man and their brother.

Hence it was with justifiable confidence that he now stepped forward, like Prince Hal, to grasp the crown of leadership which was falling from the

brow of his chief. "My due from thee is this imperial crown." <sup>1</sup>

Indeed, it was on the very day of Mr. Balfour's resignation that Mr. Austen Chamberlain asserted himself. On that evening, at the White City, he boldly jettisoned Mr. Balfour's policy of the Referendum. After pointing out that Tariff Reform was now part and parcel of Conservatism, and that every man and woman knew it, he announced that, "without need for further mandate, sanction, or approbation, the moment a Unionist party was returned to power it would set about converting their Tariff Reform propaganda, their principles of Imperial Preference, and of fair and equal treatment for their own people, into a statutory form." <sup>2</sup> This was to throw on the scrap-heap the Referendum, the deliberately adopted pledge and plan. But to get rid of it now was to roll up the programme of Mr. Balfour ostentatiously, and to fling it, without ceremony, away. That was really too much. King Henry IV seemed to be alive enough to answer, with a touch of spirit, "Dost thou so hunger for my empty chair? What! canst thou not forbear me half an hour?"

This episode set in motion, as was perhaps only natural, a certain reaction against Mr. Austen

<sup>1</sup> Second part of "King Henry IV," Act iv. Sc. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, November 9, 1911.

Chamberlain, and compromised the prospect of his election. Owing to the feeling thus set up, his well-constructed hope of leadership was consumed, having caught fire from the dying embers of Conservatism.

It was in this crisis that a new and "comparatively unknown"<sup>1</sup> statesman stepped to the front, and was unanimously elected amid sensational enthusiasm. What was the immediate cause of this startling ascent to power? Is it too much to say that it was a single speech, delivered a few days previously at York, of a nature so tactful and so judicious as to attract general notice? "I have no personal connexion with Mr. Balfour," this speaker said, and then he proceeded to devote to the man from whom the thanes were flying an admirable eulogy.<sup>2</sup> From that moment, in the phraseology of papal elections, Mr. Bonar Law was *papabile*.

But, if this may be cited as the immediate cause of the election of Mr. Bonar Law, he was also amply qualified by being highly orthodox in Protectionist economics, and by being a Tariff Reformer indeed. The construction of his mind in this respect had no shadows, or ingle-nooks, or cosy corners, like that of Mr. Balfour. He was a straight-

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, November 13, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, November 7, 1911.



out Protectionist, and he thought, and said, that the victory of the cause was imminent. His predecessor, the Louis XVI of Conservatism, had ever been reluctant to don the cockade of Protection, Retaliation, and Imperial Preference. Mr. Bonar Law would have sported it gladly, had its hues been as numerous as the coat of many colours.

There was another characteristic of the new leader which did not fail to recommend him to many minds. This was his new style, so-called, of political exposition. He himself, indeed, disclaimed that he could outbid Mr. Balfour in vehemence, on whom this manner had much grown of late, and who had recently called the action of the Prime Minister "a felon blow." Mr. Bonar Law stated modestly that this was better than "anything within my competence." Nevertheless, in this department his powers were not inconsiderable, and might even be reckoned good. His Majesty's Government were to him "the greatest collection of freaks to be found outside Madame Tussaud's,"<sup>1</sup> were only competent "in the small trickery of politics," and had simply "bought their majority by corruption."<sup>2</sup> They were "gamblers who are ready to load the dice," and humbugs with the

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Hotel Cecil, *Times*, November 27, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at the Albert Hall, *Times*, January 27, 1912.

methods of the "Artful Dodger." Under this impartial sluice of words even Civil Servants, or the employés of Government, were "locusts devouring the land"; while "the Labour Members have lost absolutely all influence over the Labour party outside the House of Commons."<sup>1</sup> Such was Conservative oratory, last phase.

But, of course, the chief feature of his political programme was Tariff Reform, upon which he termed himself "from the first an enthusiast,"<sup>2</sup> and which he considered to be of urgent importance as "the greatest of all social reforms."<sup>3</sup> In his judgment, the national reputation for good sense seemed to be closely concerned in our adopting Protection forthwith; for, if we were not businesslike, "foreigners would simply despise us the more." Our system he described as the worst of all systems, but thought that "two bad winters" would assist us to a better mind. Such is a brief summary of the general conclusions of this "imperial leader," as he was now denominated. On what grounds were they based, and what exactly was his remedy for our alleged ignorance and decline?

Perhaps the most authentic statement of his

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Albert Hall, *Times*, January 27, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Hotel Cecil, *Times*, November 27, 1907.

*Ibid.*

opinions and proposals is that made by himself in 1909.<sup>1</sup> He admitted as "true" that "we cannot have Preferential trade without a tax upon food." But he denied entirely that this would do harm, because "in all probability, the effect would be a diminution, rather than an increase, in the cost of food in the United Kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

The other main branch of his policy, besides food taxes, was a tax on imported manufactures. He argued that, as we import a considerable amount of manufactured goods annually from abroad, "an average duty of 10 per cent." would be very productive: "there can be no doubt that the Tariff Reform proposals do provide an easy and effective method of raising a large revenue."<sup>3</sup> Besides, the advantage of this scheme, according to Mr. Bonar Law, would be that, whereas "the present fiscal system . . . is mainly responsible for the growing amount of unemployment, which is admittedly the greatest evil of our time," all-round Protection would increase our exports greatly, thus fortifying our industries and helping every one. For "what we, as a nation, want more than anything else is an outlet abroad for our manufactured goods."<sup>4</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> The *Saturday Unionist Handbook*, 1909, chapter vii.

<sup>2</sup> The *Saturday Unionist Handbook*, 1909, pp. 115, 116, 117.

<sup>3</sup> P. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Pp. 114, 116.

argued, besides, more specifically, that Tariff Reform meant higher wages all round; "I do believe that Tariff Reform would tend to raise the level of wages." <sup>1</sup>

To take the food taxes first, Mr. Bonar Law, as the "strong man" of Tariff Reform, was always especially emphatic in ridiculing any opposition to these proposed imposts as an absurd, or even a dishonest, attempt upon the part of Free Traders. For instance, as early as 1907, he described the Free Trade opposition as, at first, "simply a bogey to frighten the weak-minded," but now, "a dishonest bogey as well." The duty of Tariff Reformers was to "strip this bogey," which would turn out "but a hollow turnip with the candle burnt out." <sup>2</sup> Hapless prophecy! This "hollow turnip" was, in due course, to stampede an entire embattled army, commanded, of all men, by the orator himself. All and sundry were, presently, to fly in post haste panic from this bogey, across the plank of Preference, their "first constructive plank"!

Really, if we are to conduct a post-mortem over Mr. Bonar Law's paradox as to the effect of Preferential food taxes in diminishing the cost of food, it may appear that Mr. Balfour and Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Albert Hall, *Times*, January 27, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Newcastle-on-Tyne, *Times*, October 11, 1907.

Chamberlain themselves had already disposed of it. The former, dealing with the argument that a Preferential tax on wheat would lower its cost, said: "I admit it is only a speculation; all prophecies on economic matters are speculations."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Chamberlain once stated more boldly: "I do not know whether the Hon. Member thinks that you can tax food without raising its price. I would, at any rate, lay down the axiom that that is impossible—it is only by increasing the price that you can stimulate the growth and prosperity of the Colonies."<sup>2</sup> In a word, the "all probability" of Mr. Bonar Law becomes "only a speculation" with Mr. Balfour, and was flatly "impossible" to Mr. Chamberlain.

As regards the second part of Mr. Bonar Law's programme he considered that "the mercantile classes in overwhelming numbers" favour not only food taxes but also "the taxation of foreign manufactures."<sup>3</sup> He seemed to hold that Preferential trade and taxation of foreign manufactures are part of the one idea; the one is the complement of the other, and the adoption of the one would inevitably lead to the adoption of the other. This plan he recommended, as seen above, mainly

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, February 24, 1910, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, March 24, 1882.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Newcastle-on-Tyne, *Times* October 11, 1907.

on the three grounds that it would provide "a large revenue," would raise wages and give employment, and, thirdly, would increase our exports. It would indeed be very pleasant if so simple a remedy could provide such vast benefits, and if, by taxing trade and waving the wand of Protection, we could be transported to a commercial fairyland. Unfortunately, the reasons are only too cogent for concluding that the very opposite result would occur in each case.

In order, however, to test the validity of all this by actual facts, it is important to look a little more closely than is usually done into these manufactured imports thus proposed for taxation by Mr. Bonar Law. The latest analysis of the Board of Trade bearing upon the present point does not come down beyond the figures of 1908.<sup>1</sup> In that year the Board of Trade divided our imports of manufactured articles into three classes, A, B, and C. Class A consists of articles completely manufactured and ready for consumption. Class B consists of articles manufactured, but requiring to pass through some process of adaptation, or combination, before entering into consumption. Class C consists of articles partly manufactured. Class A, after deducting re-exports, amounted in 1908 to £44·8 millions; class

<sup>1</sup> "British and Foreign Trade and Industry." Statistical tables 1854-1908, Cd. 4954, 1909, pp. 48-49.

B, after deducting re-exports, to £49·9 millions; class C, after deducting re-exports, to £25·1 millions. Thus the total of these net imports of manufactured articles was in that year nearly £120,000,000, and though they have risen since, it is not very materially.

We must turn to another Bluebook in order to ascertain the general character of these different classes of goods. To take the classes in their inverse order, class C is formed chiefly of metals, yarns, textile fabrics, and chemicals, all of value for our other industries. Class B is similarly composed, though there should be added manufactures of wood and timber, of leather, earthenware and glass, also useful for our other industries. Class A is constituted of like headings, with some additional ones. Under "machinery" in this class, for instance, comes "machinery and mill work, or parts thereof"; or under "chemicals" comes "quinine and quinine salts"; or under "cutlery and hardware" comes "instruments and apparatus, surgical, anatomical, and scientific." †

Now, if we proceed upon the admitted principle of not taxing the raw materials of our industries, evidently we shall not be ready to tax classes B and C, for the articles of both these classes, not being ready for consumption, afford work to our artisans

† "British and Foreign Trade and Industry," second series, Cd. 2337, 1904, Appendix D of Memorandum XII, pp. 338-9.



already. So far from raising their wages, which Mr. Bonar Law declared to be his purpose, we should obviously prejudice them, if we put a tax on what is in effect the material of their employment. But, if so, that would only leave class A, £44·8 millions, or perhaps at the present date £50 millions, as taxable. Even here, however, if, as indicated above, this last class consists of many useful articles, such as machinery for mills, or chemicals, or surgical appliances, to burden these by duties would, to say the least, be no advantage. Granted, however, that we could raise a revenue by taxing class A, how much would it be?

Mr. Bonar Law, who originally favoured a 10 per cent. duty, has now, presumably for good reasons, abandoned even that. He now tells the country that, on coming into power, "we shall impose a tariff, a moderate tariff, lower than exists now in any industrial country in the world, on foreign manufactured goods"; "in Belgium there is an industrial tariff higher than we mean to impose."<sup>1</sup> His tariff, on this basis, could not be higher than 3 per cent. Taking into account the cost of collection of his duties, his "large revenue" thus vanishes away, unless, indeed, he intends to tax all manufactured imports indiscriminately, in which case he will inevitably be dealing blows right and

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Edinburgh, *Times*, January 25, 1913.



left at wages, which he has set out to raise. In the latter case, in the words of Mr. Chamberlain, "Protection would swell the profits of the capitalists who were fortunate enough to engage in the best protected industries. But it would lessen the total production of the country, it would diminish the rate of wages, and it would raise the price of every necessity of life."<sup>1</sup>

It will be observed that Mr. Bonar Law had a further argument for the taxation of imports. He has emphasised more than once the fact that, outside the bounds of this country, the aim of Tariff Reform is to enlarge the market for our manufactured goods, and that what is most needed is an outlet abroad.<sup>2</sup> But then, surely, that is an argument in favour of our existing Free Trade system, which does not merely "aim" at "an outlet abroad" but has secured increasingly any number of outlets abroad, as witness the unparalleled expansion of our exports, from £290,800,000 in 1903 up to the unparalleled total of £487,400,000 in 1912. So far from failing to find an outlet abroad under Free Trade, our exports are now being sent to fifty countries, or thereabouts. Only one country, India, received, according to the figures of 1912, more than 10 per cent. of our total sales. Indeed, so widely are they

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Birmingham, January 5, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, *Times*, October 11, 1907.

apportioned that, with the exception of a few countries that take between 9 and 5 per cent. each, no one of the generality of countries takes more than 5 per cent. The outflow of our exports under the Free Trade system is thus becoming variously distributed into numberless "outlets abroad," and Mr. Bonar Law's desideratum is being fully met.

It is Tariff Reform that would invalidate this process. For, if we taxed the "foreigner," the foreigner could and very possibly would retaliate, taxing our manufactured exports at a higher rate than now. It sounds very fine, and it is very easy, to declaim before a public audience that we should tax those that tax us. But, as Mr. Chamberlain once said, "Retaliation is a game at which two can play, and that we shall play at a great disadvantage. We stand to lose in the game of Retaliation."<sup>1</sup> The simple reason is that the mass of our imports from abroad are food and raw materials, which it would be disastrous for us to tax, while the mass of our exports, being manufactured articles, are not equally indispensable to the foreigner and could be taxed by him without similar disaster to himself.

But to say this is to plumb only half way down the depth of the misconception that duties on our imported manufactures will increase our exports. For consider how we stand. It is vital for us to

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, March 24, 1882, p. 1901.

procure the food and raw materials which we do not possess ourselves. We obtain those necessities mainly by means of our exported manufactures. These latter exports have to compete everywhere successfully with those of our rivals in the world's markets, and have to be so excellent as to over-leap foreign tariffs. A chief stimulus to that vital efficiency is Free Trade, because under our Free Trade system our manufacturers feel at once in our domestic market the invading power of any new invention or improved process, and are at once obliged to meet it by superior methods of manufacture. There is the recent case of the boot and shoe trade, where the Americans began to capture our home market by advanced processes of production, a position from which we presently drove them, thus correspondingly increasing our exports of boots and shoes, now made on the most approved modern principles, to foreign markets. But if our manufacturers had "enjoyed" a "scientific tariff" calculated to stop the American invasion, that Free Trade stimulus, with its excellent results upon our exports, would obviously never have reached them directly at all.

The fact is that the words of Sir Robert Peel are even more cogent and true to-day than they were when he uttered them. In introducing Free Trade he said: "I have no guarantee to give you that other

countries will immediately follow our example. . . . I give you all the benefit of that argument. I rely upon that fact as conclusive proof of the policy of the course we are pursuing. It is a fact that other countries have not followed our example, and have levied higher duties in some cases upon our goods. But what has been the result upon the amount of our exports? You have defied the regulations of those countries. Your export trade has greatly increased." <sup>1</sup> And again he said, after some years of further experience: "I maintain that the best way to compete with hostile tariffs is to encourage free imports. So far from thinking the principle of Protection a salutary principle, I maintain that, the more widely you extend it, the greater the injury you will inflict on the national wealth and the more you will cripple the national industry." <sup>2</sup>

This is the policy, fundamental and vital to our prosperity, which Mr. Balfour, Bimetallist and Tariff Reformer, has denounced as "extraordinarily foolish," <sup>3</sup> but which he was careful never to touch when in office. This is the policy which his successor, Mr. Bonar Law, equally contemns and would abolish, substituting its opposite, for which he is "an enthusiast." Yet he too, after a few

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, January 27, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, July 5, 1849.

<sup>3</sup> "Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade," p. 30.

brief months of responsibility, has already half abandoned one half of his own policy, the food taxes, with a vague promise to resume it at some unknown date ; while, as regards the other moiety, sheer Protection, he has already cut down his proposed rate of duty from 10 per cent. to 3 per cent. presumably, as though he, too, when faced with the facts, could do nothing else than begin to be a Free Trader. It is true that he now advocates "Imperial Preference without food taxes." But then, as already quoted above, he himself has already pointed out that "we cannot have Preferential trade without a tax upon food."

Besides these twin policies of Preference and Protection, a third was now ushered into the world by Mr. Bonar Law. It wore neither a domestic aspect, like Protection at home, nor an international and colonial appearance, like Preference. This third policy was introduced as newly arrived from the East, though it is not on record that the East is prepared to endorse it. It boded even worse for all concerned than either of the first two ; for it was calculated, not only to threaten our export trade at a vital point, but also to contradict and even abrogate that mutual goodwill which is the very basis of our Indian Empire.

No wonder that the Secretary of State for India felt it his duty immediately to reply to this start-

ling programme. "I deliberately characterise it as an unexampled misfortune in the history of our imperial connexion with India," he said. "I warn him that it will be resented in India, that it is resented already, and that, if he ever seeks to put it into practice, it will be resented in a manner that will create an unprecedented strain on India's loyalty to the Empire."<sup>1</sup>

In order to comprehend the bearing of these statements, it is desirable, first, to understand the general character of India's trade; next, to grasp the principles of her existing fiscal policy; and thirdly, to estimate the exact nature of what Mr. Bonar Law termed explicitly "my policy for India,"<sup>2</sup> and the inevitable result of that "policy" for the Empire at large.

Of the character of India's seaborne trade it is enough to say that India is in the main an agricultural country and that her exports are mainly of those products. She possesses also flourishing manufactures, such as spinning and weaving mills for cotton and factories for jute. She has nascent industries, such as iron and steel, and also others in an incipient stage, but full of promise of growth and expansion. These are chiefly for home consumption, but India exports cotton

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Cheltenham, *Times*, December 5, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Lord Crewe, *Times*, December 5, 1912.

yarns to the Far East, and cloth to Africa, Persia, Arabia, and to the islands of her seas. Of her total exports 26 per cent, or thereabouts, were taken by ourselves at the date now in question, a ratio not materially affected since.

Per contra, her imports are mainly of manufactured goods, no less than 62 per cent, or thereabouts, of which came at that date from Britain, that is, somewhat over £50,000,000—a trade upon which depend hundreds of our mills, thousands of flourishing auxiliary businesses, and the wages of hundreds of thousands of our working classes. The figure in 1912 was £57,600,000.

Turning next to her fiscal policy, she has a low tariff, adapted, broadly speaking, for revenue purposes. In the words of the Indian Government, "the Indian tariff, with one or two unimportant exceptions, imposes duties purely for revenue purposes. It is entirely free from any trace of Preference, and from any protective intention . . . its ruling feature is a low duty." To illustrate this, and to take the leading case of the cotton trade, India, while levying nothing on her imports of yarns, charges a  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent duty on the general cotton products of the loom. But, in order that this tax may not be protective, she charges a countervailing excise, or internal tax, upon the home-made products of her domestic power looms.



It is to be observed that she allows no preference or favour to Britain. No less than about 91·78 per cent of India's total cotton imports come from us, but these are taxed impartially by India at the same rate as the imports of all other countries.

India, like ourselves, has Tariff Reformers among her manufacturers. Lord Minto, ex-Viceroy of India, stated in 1911<sup>1</sup> that in the future, and very soon, we should be hearing strong expressions of opinion from manufacturing interests in India in favour of Tariff Reform, or Protection.

It is evident that we touch here on a principle of profound importance. Our Government and the Indian Government are indissolubly connected, the link, of course, being the Secretary of State for India. If we adopt Protection as our policy, on what ground can we refuse the Indian manufacturing interests when they ask for Protection, since we ourselves should be Protectionist? "A British Government which rejects the fiscal theory of industrial Protection as inequitable and adverse to the general welfare of any country, and proves its sincerity by respecting the practice for this country, can answer these arguments. But addressed to Mr. Bonar Law and his party, who believe that industrial Protection is a wise and just measure, without which industrial development cannot be

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Central Asian Society, *Times*, May 18, 1911.



properly fostered and maintained, they surely will remain unanswerable." <sup>1</sup> Indian and English Free Trade are interlocked. But if Free Trade is abolished here and India obtains Protection at the hands of a Protectionist British Government, it will not merely be, in the eyes of Free Traders, a sacrifice of the best interests of her people to the objects of Tariff Reform, but it will also constitute an obstacle of the gravest nature to that vast commerce between us which is now so eminently advantageous to both countries.

After this brief statement of the general character of India's trade and of the principles of her fiscal policy, it is time to turn to the policy of Mr. Bonar Law. His first assumption as regards our Indian fiscal policy was that "our present position in India is an impossible one," and that "the present policy cannot honestly be justified by any Government."<sup>2</sup> This constitutes, of course, one of the severest indictments that has probably been uttered by a responsible British statesman against our Indian administration. Our position is publicly proclaimed as "impossible," and our Government is simply dishonest if it attempts to justify it. Why? Mr. Bonar Law has advanced no proof of these allegations.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Crewe, *Times*, December 23, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Oldham, *Times*, November 9, 1912.

Nor was this all. He plunged in further, and propounded a Tariff Reform policy of his own for India, arguing that "we had claims on India. We had done India great service, and had a right to say openly that we were entitled to fair play upon the Indian market. What Tariff Reform said to India was: 'If you want to put on Tariffs, put them on against the rest of the world, but be a Free Trade country to us, and we will be a Free Trade country to you.' That was a policy that could be justified."<sup>1</sup> A few moments' thought will surely convince anyone that such a scheme would be not merely unjustifiable, but calamitous to trade and empire alike.

This policy is, in plain terms, as follows: Mr. Bonar Law, Protectionist, comes into office and enacts Protection here. India also enacts Protection, but is not allowed to establish duties against us but only "against the rest of the world." She is to be "a Free Trade country to us." Consider this in practice, by a leading example. Out of India's total imports of cotton goods at the date of Mr. Bonar Law's speech, no less than 91.78 per cent came from England. All this is to be admitted by India free of duty altogether, according to Mr. Bonar Law. "Then where"—the Indian Tariff Reformers will unanswerably ask—"is our Tariff Reform, and where is our revenue? You have simply defrauded us.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Oldham, *Times*, November 9, 1912.

Your new plan of giving us Protection nominally, and at the same time depriving us of it, and even of the revenue which we have obtained hitherto from your exports to us, cannot on any ground be 'honestly justified.'" In the words of Lord Crewe, "the Protectionist demand in India is for Protection against the mother country and nothing less, for the mother country is by far the largest competitor with Indian manufactures." <sup>1</sup>

To this Mr. Bonar Law has answered that, after all, "so far as cotton goods are concerned, the competition which Indians have most reason to fear is not that of Lancashire; it is the competition of Japan and perhaps of China." But according to the official statement of the Indian Government, this is an unsound rendering of the facts. For whereas 91·78 per cent of the total cotton imports into India were coming from Lancashire, 1·52 per cent only were coming from Japan, and 0·05 per cent from China. The rejoinder of Mr. Bonar Law has therefore no basis.

But all this, grave as it is, is dwarfed by the nature of Mr. Bonar Law's further reply to this criticism. He says in effect that we can force India to act as he proposes because we have "done India great service" in the past. In plain terms, we are to utilise our past services to India, in order to deprive

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Cheltenham, *Times*, December 5, 1912.

India of what, in Mr. Bonar Law's eyes, is the best policy for her. She is to be Free Trade to us and Protectionist to others. "Lord Goschen once accused Tariff Reformers of gambling with the food of the people here. Knowing what India thinks, will Mr. Bonar persist in gambling with the goodwill of the Indian people?"<sup>1</sup>

Even this, however, does not exhaust the injury which the policy thus enunciated would inflict. The consideration that England, as indicated above, takes from India only 26 per cent of all Indian exports, and that the rest go elsewhere, opens up a new danger arising out of Mr. Bonar Law's policy. What will foreign nations have to say to being taxed by India in the manner suggested? The Indian Government of Lord Curzon's time pointed out that, "as India is a debtor country, it follows therefore that we are at present dependent on our trade with foreign countries for the discharge of our net international obligations . . . it is therefore a vital object with us to stimulate our exports by every means in our power."<sup>2</sup> But if India became Protectionist and heavily taxed her imports from foreign countries, this would involve her in

<sup>1</sup> Lord Crewe, speech at Bournemouth, *Times*, December 12, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> "Views of the Government of India on the Question of Preferential Tariffs," 1904, Cd. 1931, pp. 5, 9.

tariff wars and retaliation, with the result of a serious check to her exports. "We cannot sufficiently impress this danger on your attention."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Mr. Bonar Law's "Indian policy" is fraught with evil not merely to the trade of England and India alike, but cuts at the very root of that principle of mutual goodwill which is the true essence of the British Empire.

Such were the principles and the policy of Mr. Bonar Law, the leader of the Tariff Reform, or ex-Conservative, party. They appear, on examination, to be replete with mischief, and even danger, alike for the domestic, the international, and the imperial interests of Great Britain. Nor was the method of his leadership reassuring. "Some people sometimes accuse me of using violent language," he said. . . . "In my opinion it is not what I say that is violent, but what I mean."<sup>2</sup> We have, indeed, travelled fast and far. And again, he has told us that "the standard of success which I set up is the amount of irritation which my speech has caused to my opponents."<sup>3</sup> In extenuation of all this, we may remember with Burke that, "to tax and to please no more than to love and be wise, is not given to

<sup>1</sup> "Views of the Government of India on the Question of Preferential Tariffs," 1904, Cd. 1931, pp. 5, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Hôtel Métropole, *Times*, October 26, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons, February 20, 1912, p. 563.

men.”<sup>1</sup> But we cannot but recur also to that other dictum of the same writer ; that it is the function of statesmen “to bring the dispositions that are lovely in private life into the service and conduct of the commonwealth ; so to be patriots as not to forget we are gentlemen.”<sup>2</sup>

If such was the programme which Mr. Bonar Law had adopted in the past, and would develop in the future, it might naturally be thought that, as soon as he was in the saddle, he would spur away at a gallop, to the instant overthrow of Free Trade. Yet, by some curious fatality, once mounted, he too seemed to linger at the post. Was the horse unwilling or was the rider upset ?

For instance, at his first public appearance at Leeds, he might almost have been another Mr. Balfour. “I do not pretend,” he said, “that a change in our fiscal system will cure all evils, but I do contend that it will help the greatest of our social evils—chronic unemployment. For this claim there is at least some justification.”<sup>3</sup> To contend that there was some justification that Tariff Reform would help to cure chronic unemployment—this was indeed a mild zephyr after the raging tearing blast of unofficial days.

<sup>1</sup> Speech on American Taxation, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Thoughts on the cause of the Present Discontents, 1770.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Leeds, *Times*, November 17, 1911.

Again, early in 1912, at the Albert Hall : " I cannot sit down without saying one or two sentences on that subject "—" We cannot abandon it " as being the greatest of all social reforms. Further " the leaders of our party, if they show any hesitation on this question, will shatter that party to its foundations " . . . " we shall take care that any change in our fiscal system for which we are responsible is as little revolutionary as possible " ! What must Birmingham have thought of this backhanded eulogy ? Worse still, the usual Tariff Reform amendment to the address was dropped at the opening of the session of 1912.

Where, in all this, was the imperial leader and strong man ? No wonder that, as the months ran on, Mr. Jesse Collings, the muezzin, felt it high time to emit a rallying cry to the fiscal faithful from his minaret. He rebuked in no measured language " the apathy of the leaders of the Unionist Party, who seem to rely on a policy of negation, and to be silent on the constructive policy that is needed. " <sup>1</sup>

Whence the reason for this strange slackening in the pulse of Tariff Reform—for this unexpected fall from feverish to normal ? It was due to two main causes, one strictly economic, and the other as purely political. This pair of diverse and potent influences seemed to converge suddenly about the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the *Outlook*, June 29, 1912.



time of Mr. Bonar Law's entry upon leadership, and exercised a conjoint effect upon the fortunes of Tariff Reform. It is necessary to explain and estimate them, tracing them out to their unexpected result.

As often stated, and as, indeed, is obvious, the foreign investments of this country, which go out principally in the form of manufactures, are on an enormous scale. The best authority, Sir George Paish, has calculated that these investments abroad are divided equally between the Empire and foreign countries—another good reason, by the way, for mitigating some of those Protectionist assaults upon the "foreigner."

The same authority calculates that, of the total capital thus put abroad, about 60 per cent is in railways, while the remaining 40 per cent goes to produce food, minerals, and materials. By this means we multiply the very things necessary for our existence, and at the same time provide the means of conveying them hither. So we develop others and ourselves in common. In the increasing prosperity of the colonist, the Asiatic, and the "foreigner," England seeks and finds her own.

It so happened, however, for reasons too old to concern us much, that from about 1894 to about 1904, we ceased to invest abroad so freely as we



might have done. It was, partly, that foreign credit in the United States, in South America, and in Australia had, in those years, been shaken to its foundations: it was partly due to the large absorption of our savings in the Boer war. But, whatever the causes of this check, Lilliput was disinclined to lend to Brobdingnag. Or, as Sir Edgar Speyer has put it, "from 1894 to 1904 Great Britain did not provide the capital needed to increase the world's supplies of food and raw materials, as it had done in former years . . . an unusually large investment of capital was therefore needed to restore the balance."<sup>1</sup>

All this begins to cast a ray of light upon the history and the cause of Tariff Reform. This slowing down of our exports of capital was, in other words, that slowing down of our exports of manufactured goods, upon which Mr. Chamberlain founded his case so largely in 1903. When he exclaimed to breathless audiences that "sugar has gone; iron is threatened; wool is threatened; cotton will go," when he compared our artisans to sheep one by one "led to slaughter," all that was really happening was that our exports had received a check prior to resuming their onward way with a vigour all the more boundless for their temporary repose. Those dwindling exports! They were

<sup>1</sup> Address by Sir Edgar Speyer, *The Statist*, May 27, 1911.

£290,800,000 in 1903, but in the year 1912 they rose to £487,400,000, or by about 67 per cent.

Mr. Chamberlain, indeed, only fell into the same misconception as Lord Randolph Churchill who said, in 1884, "your iron industry is dead, dead as mutton; your silk industry is dead, assassinated by the foreigner. Your woollen industry is *in articulo mortis*, gasping, struggling. Your cotton industry is seriously sick . . . survey any branch of British industry you like, you will find signs of mortal disease."<sup>1</sup> On such smooth wheels runs the whirling-gig of error. Sure it is that at the next relapse of our exports our ears will again be grated with the same melancholy song.

But what was more surprising, Mr. Balfour shared the same illusion to the full, and drew, in his "Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade," the same dismal portrait though in somewhat less glaring tints. "Is our position going to worsen relatively to that of other nations, or even to worsen absolutely?" he wrote—"I see no satisfactory symptoms."<sup>2</sup>

These jeremiads were perfectly fresh to all minds in 1911 and 1912. For years our trade policy had been proclaimed as an absurdity and had borne all the brunt of the sarcasms of Mr. Chamberlain, Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Blackpool, January 24, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> "Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade," p. 23.

Balfour, and Mr. Bonar Law. Now, people began to see that this language of despair not merely might be hurtful to our commercial credit, but that it was actually and demonstrably erroneous. If the Tariff Reform leaders could be so wrong about the elementary facts of our export trade, were they to be allowed to revolutionise its principles on some vague or even exploded hypothesis ?

Further, it was evident that, as England had recently limited her exports of capital, there were considerable arrears to be made up in the supplies of those foods and raw materials which it is the function of that capital to produce. Hence one main reason for the rising price of foodstuffs and for the increasing cost of living. But how absurd, men thought, to choose this time of all others for taxing these very foodstuffs, and for thus adding to the expense of life for our population ! True, there was the double pledge of Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain, issued in 1910, that "Tariff Reform will not increase the cost of living of the working classes."<sup>1</sup> The public were indeed assured by a prominent Tariff Reformer that they should "believe in the good faith of two Englishmen." But for statesmen to give personal guarantees as to the results of their policy is to incur a liability to the public which they cannot discharge and which the public has no means of exacting.

<sup>1</sup> Joint letter dated January 14, 1910.

Besides the growth of exports and the rise of prices, another consideration, equally destructive of the Tariff Reform theories, began to impress itself on the public mind. All the Tariff Reformers had urged that, if we taxed foreign wheat, and spared colonial wheat, that would be a huge bonus to the Empire which would thus be bound to ourselves by gratitude. There were obvious fallacies here; for instance, some parts of the Empire would not benefit by this Preference, and thus friction and discontent would certainly be set up. To this it was answered that Canadian prosperity, at any rate, would be stimulated, and that we must do something for our Colonies.

But now several facts began to emerge into a new, or a renewed, light, against the reasons for taxing wheat. First, the universal voice of our capitalists and financial experts announced the immense prosperity of our Dominions and of Canada in chief, thanks to the unexampled facilities furnished by a young and virgin soil for creating wealth. Canadians themselves were forward to ask why the agricultural labourer or the city artisan in the old home should bestow bonuses on flourishing farmers of the prairies of Alberta or Saskatchewan, on transatlantic plutocrats, on the abounding magnates of the Canadian Pacific or Grand Trunk Railways, and even on those eager financiers at home

who were crowding every ship across the ocean in order to buy land out yonder and reap the fruit.

Then, too, people commenced to enquire whether we did not give an enormous Preference to the Colonies as it was. An investigation was instituted, and the Prime Minister said : " Of the sum of 3,500 millions of British capital which in the course of our generation, or mainly in the lifetime of our generation, has left our shores, at least one half, 1,800 millions, has been devoted to the development of our Dominions and Dependencies. . . . Further, a fact not often sufficiently recognised—by comparatively recent legislation we have given the position of trustee securities to no less than 650 millions of stocks and shares which represent Colonial, Indian, and oversea investments . . . you will find that our Colonies and Dependencies have benefited to the extent of at least £10,000,000 a year by the terms, the favourable terms, under which they have obtained their capital from this country. People talk of Colonial and Imperial Preference—in that £10,000,000 a year you have a far more fruitful form of Preference than any of the latter-day devices for restoring the old system of Protection under which neither the Mother Country nor the Colonies ever profited at all." <sup>1</sup>

But yet another truth had slowly but steadily

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Liberal Colonial Club, May 24, 1911.

enforced itself upon the public mind, destructive of our alleged obligation to tax ourselves for the sake of the Dominions. Were not we already shouldering our fair share of the burden of safety and the cost of defence? So long ago as 1902, even Mr. Chamberlain had said: "We think that it is time that our children should assist us. . . . The Colonies are rich and powerful . . . the United Kingdom is a mere speck in the Northern Sea. . . . There is a naval and military expenditure per head of the population of the United Kingdom of 29s. 3d. per annum; in Canada, the same items involve an expenditure of only 2s. per head. No one will pretend that this is a fair distribution of the burden of Empire." Since then, that disproportion had considerably increased.

All this was beginning to be recognised by reasonable men in the Dominions themselves. The Canadian Premier presently stated: "For 45 years as a Confederation we have enjoyed the protection of the British navy without the cost of a dollar . . . so far as official estimates are available, the expenditure of Great Britain in naval and military defence for the provinces which now constitute Canada during the 19th century, was not less than £80,000,000. Has the protection of the flag and the prestige of the Empire meant anything for us during all that period? Hundreds of illustrations are at hand."

He ended by pointing out that "almost unaided, the Mother land, not for herself alone, but for us as well, is sustaining the burden of a vital Imperial duty and confronting an overmastering necessity of national existence."<sup>1</sup> But, then, if that were so, it seemed so utterly inequitable that Tariff Reformers should be charging us with want of "imperial" zest, and should be clamouring for fresh food taxes to be imposed upon our labourers and artisans in the cause of "Imperialism." According to Tariff Reform policy, the weary Titan, staggering under the orb of empire, was to be taken in charge and fined.

In fact, Tariff Reform, as it was preached authoritatively, was making "imperialism" suspect, and even odious, to multitudes of loyal men throughout the country. If, instead of being preached, it were to be practised, it would initiate, to judge from the gathering symptoms of its unpopularity, an uprising of popular feeling against "imperialism" which might well fuse the true imperial sentiment and set the structure of empire alight.

This, then, was the economic cause, or the economic causes, which, in the closing months of 1911 and in the opening months of 1912, were giving pause to Tariff Reformers and even to their leader. But what a disappointment to Birming-

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Mr. Borden, Canadian House of Commons Debates, December 5, 1912.



ham! The vintage of 1903 had been laid down amid such fond anticipation and such glowing advertisement! Why did the cellarer not decant it? Customers began to whisper that it was corked.

In addition to the economic factors in the situation which were crying halt to the Tariff Reform movement, there was now added a political factor of high importance to divert men's minds. The National Insurance Bill had been introduced by Mr. Lloyd George into the House of Commons, and had been read a first and second time in May, 1911. It might be deemed one of the most considerable legislative efforts hitherto made to remedy and elevate the condition of a people.

The measure had been at first received without party antagonism. In August, for instance, it was officially stated by the spokesman of the Opposition in the House of Commons that, when the Bill was introduced, they had promised co-operation and good will in discussion, and had kept that promise.<sup>1</sup> Many Conservative members had welcomed the Bill. However, as time went on, it became generally apparent that, owing to the principle adopted by Mr. Lloyd George that the working classes were to contribute directly to their own benefits, it would be, for the time at any rate, excessively distasteful to many.

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, August 4, 1911.



This fact began to be highly appreciated in the constituencies and at the bye-elections. According to Mr. Bonar Law, until the Hull election in June, 1911, no leaflet of any kind against the Insurance Bill was sent from the office of the party.<sup>1</sup> From June onward the attack began at the bye-elections of Luton in July, of Middleton in August, of Kilmarnock and South Somerset, and of North Ayrshire and Govan in December. It was now termed "a monstrous Bill" and "this cursed Bill." In December, the Opposition decided to move a "reasoned amendment" to the Third Reading. Altogether, the tide of alarmed discontent was beginning to rise against the measure, and therefore presumably against the Government.

In these circumstances it began to be hoped that the country might in due course be captured, and that even Lancashire, which, with Yorkshire and Scotland, was the stronghold of Free Trade, would pass over, as it were, by a *coup de main*, to Tariff Reform. As usual, it was Mr. Chamberlain who was earliest in the field. "The meetings in Lancashire," he wrote, "have proved that a great change has taken place in this country."<sup>2</sup> On the very day of Mr. Bonar Law's election to the leadership, Oldham was lost to the Government. The

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, December 6, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, November 9, 1911.

successful candidate attributed his victory, in the main, to the way in which the Government were handling the Insurance Bill in the House of Commons. But if all this were so before the people had begun to pay their contributions, would there not be a landslide of unpopularity in 1912, when contributions would have to be paid out of pocket? And so it proved.

This new political phenomenon was speedily reflected in the action of the Unionist leader in January, 1912. He attacked the Insurance Act in his normal language. Not only was the method by which it had been carried "a disgrace to the Government and a degradation of the House of Commons," but also it was "hasty and ill-considered," and to crown all, "I believe it in vital principles to be bad."<sup>1</sup> A few months later he pledged himself when in office to "drastically amend it."<sup>2</sup> Under the inspiration of this uncompromising invective, bye-election after bye-election went against the Government, or else recorded the transfer of many votes; and the dislike of the Insurance Act was worked for all that it was worth. In August, 1912, it was finally excommunicated in high Tariff Reform quarters as "the blunder which we have always held it to be."

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Albert Hall, *Times*, January 27, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated August 27, 1912.

It is therefore becoming apparent why not only for economic, but also for political reasons, the pace of Tariff Reform began to slow down in the opening quarter of 1912. Some in touch with the stable thought that they had a better horse than Tariff Reform entered for the Grand National, and that they stood to win on a chaser which originally had been voted an outsider by the ring. No wonder that the *Morning Post*, always so uncompromising in its principles, on the occasion of a Norfolk bye-election in June, could ask whether "the party machine was responsible for these tactics." "Officially the Unionists were dumb . . . the Free Traders had a lorry," but, at the Unionist lorry, the orator had "instructions to say nothing about Tariff Reform." "The whole thing savours of madness."<sup>1</sup>

Piled up behind the Insurance Act came the Home Rule Bill, introduced in April, 1912, and read a second time in May. This, together with the anticipated consequences of the Insurance Act, fired the hopes of the Opposition to boiling-point.

Here again, Mr. Bonar Law was ready. In his characteristic language he said the Government was "a revolutionary committee which has seized by fraud upon despotic power!" He was not

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, June 3, 1912.

far from encouraging civil war in July. After a reference to "force," he assured his audience that "I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go in which I shall not be ready to support them."<sup>1</sup>

These heroics, however, were well enough but for one dominating and overshadowing fact. Mr. Bonar Law and his whilom Conservatives in their zeal against the Insurance Act and the Home Rule Bill, were forgetting Birmingham. Where, in all this, Birmingham might well ask them, lay "the first constructive plank"? Tariff Reform was slipping out of sight, unless Birmingham recalled it to the public memory.

From the Birmingham point of view, the constitution of Tariff Reform, under the stress of all these political excitements and under the ever-growing strain of economic causes, had begun to be neglected. The proper remedy would be more exercise in the open, instead of this confined, almost subterranean, life. Coupled with this, a sharp tonic, a stringent restorative was needed—some stiff prescription of bark and steel.

In May, 1912, Birmingham began to take its measures. It put on the screw.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Blenheim, July 27, 1912.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CAUCUS TAKES CHARGE

IT is apparent, from the foregoing observations, that, at the end of 1911 and at the opening of 1912, the Caucus could scarcely contemplate the course of events with unalloyed approbation. Mr. Bonar Law and his followers had, indeed, proved themselves willing enough in service and had earned a character for diligence in the cause ; yet, somehow, latterly, a certain reluctance to answer the bell had been creeping over them. Besides, was it quite for the best that the tap of the new leader's invective against the Insurance Act should always be running on ? Meanwhile, the food taxes might be growing stale and cold downstairs. So Birmingham rang sharply and took measures to pull up the household.

The first actual step was one of the most successful yet adopted by Mr. Austen Chamberlain. Though the Caucus had assimilated the old Conservative party, the name lingered on. It was decided at

this juncture to erase it from the page of future history. The conduct of the whole matter was particularly skilful. Ordinarily, a person with a name to be dropped might be supposed to object, unless, indeed, the process be associated with a legacy. Here, there was liability, not legacy. Yet the erstwhile Conservatives in question now allowed themselves to be presented publicly as the authors or abettors of this act of extinction.

Accordingly, early in May, 1912, it was announced that there was to be a "fusion." The name Conservative was dropped as regards the party, which henceforth was to be known as Unionist, though, as a sop, the offices of the party were to be denominated "The National Unionist Association of Conservative and Liberal Unionist Organisations."

Nothing that forethought could supply was omitted. A letter was read from Mr. Balfour, of all men, to say "I entirely approve"! None other than Mr. Walter Long seconded the resolution. Mr. Bonar Law made a speech, remarking in characteristic style that "our opponents have bitten off more than they can chew, and they know it." He laid it down that "our constitution should be from top to bottom on a democratic basis."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, May 10, 1912.

Elsewhere, there were official, or semi-official, eulogies. The party, it seemed, was "to be heartily congratulated upon having carried out a delicate operation with complete success," and would thereby be "morally stronger than before." There was now "the full development of electoral government within the party"; and all was to be worked so as "to enlist the sympathy of the sober sensible people in every class of the community."

The whole movement of fusion was consummated on June 27, when a banquet was held at the Hotel Cecil at which Mr. Walter Long "rejoiced that now they were one party"; while Mr. Austen Chamberlain said that there was going to be "an early victory," inasmuch as they had such excellent leaders and had opposed to them "a Government of uncertain mind." Such was the initiation, at the hands of the Tariff Reformers, of the National Unionist Party, as Mr. Austen Chamberlain described it.

But, if to capture the entire organisation of the party, in word as well as in deed, was practical politics, action should follow. No one, in fact, must henceforth be allowed to avoid the food taxes, the very corner-stone of the whole policy of Mr. Chamberlain, and the very Kaaba of Mecca. Yet, on all sides, candidates were shirking that essential issue, and elections were being won on

other topics. That was not to be tolerated, least of all now, with victory in sight. If that were allowed, then in what respect would Mr. Bonar Law be better than the departed Mr. Balfour? Like Lord Kitchener, who, after the battle of Omdurman, had broken up the Mahdi's tomb that it might no longer harbour worshippers, so Birmingham had dug up the tombstone of the Conservative party and had erased the inscription. All in vain, if Hedgers and Ditchers alike were filing thitherward at election-tide for genuflexion.

The method now taken in June to stop the "rot" among Tariff Reformers was to mobilise the Confederates. The full significance of the Confederacy in Tariff Reform politics needs to be explained and understood.

As the discipline of the old Conservative party had decayed under the slackening control of Mr. Balfour and the impact of Tariff Reform, many turbulent bands of irregulars had started up. They flouted authority and were sometimes saucy in the ranks. The root of this mischief was that these insurgents had been serving since 1903 under a double command, and had learnt to push their claims between the gaps in the duplicate headquarters. Among the more prominent to these Mahrattas were the Hooligans, the Unionist



Réveillé Committee, and, chiefest of all, the Confederates.

Of the Hooligans—or Hughligans, so spelt from the name of the free lance who lent himself to that cause—little need be said. Their most noted achievements were to shout down the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, and also to carry through the memorable “brawl” of November, 1912, when an adept Hooligan, seizing the Speaker’s copy of the Standing Orders, threw it and struck a Minister on the face.

Next to these must be mentioned the Unionist Réveillé Committee.

The Réveillé Committee originated in 1910, and consisted of “about a hundred active and wealthy members of both Houses.”<sup>1</sup> This group let it be known at that date that, “the Unionist position on Imperial Preference should be made absolutely plain.” Soon came its manifesto, a “constructive” one, which had five heads. Apart from Tariff Reform and “a scientific tariff,” which formed the real gist of this quintuple programme, their remaining policy might perhaps be defined as that of the big ship and the small ownership. It was imaginative too; “the national policy may be compared to a dock.” But in this metaphor the manifesto got so entangled that the national policy

<sup>1</sup> Press Notices, October 5, 1910.

appeared to end in the dock where it had begun—a place to which its proposed public finance of huge loans would, perhaps, in any case have conducted it.

Last, but by far the most influential, of these bodies are the Confederates, once called “political moonlighters” by an angry Conservative. This force was organised, apparently, in 1907, and its nature and policy were fully explained by a Confederate in 1909.<sup>1</sup> Its goal was, and is, Tariff Reform. Its policy, it seems, is directed by an influential twelve, annually elected, whom everybody obeys. Any person suspected of having a leaning towards Free Trade in the Unionist party is marked down to be ejected, and funds are sent down to the local agent of the Confederacy to oppose and harry him at once. There is, we are told, an admirable system of scouts for this purpose. “Money, and sufficient, for its wants the Confederacy can safely rely upon.” “The Confederacy comprises many men whose pockets are as deep as their political convictions, and just as full.” “Most of the correspondence on questions of Tariff Reform that is carried on in the Press, many of the articles that appear in monthly periodicals, are the work of its members.” “By such methods

<sup>1</sup> Article by a Confederate, *National Review*, January, 1909.

the gospel of Tariff Reform is carried." The leaders, it seems, are overawed and dominated, and the rank and file of the party are hectored into Tariff Reform. "Its efforts are encouraged by many in influential quarters."

It is now, perhaps, possible to appreciate something of the inner significance of the following step taken on June 15, 1912, by the Tariff Reformers. It was formally announced in the Press on that date that: "The 'Confederacy' an organisation about which little has lately been heard, has been carefully considering the tendency shown by several Unionist candidates at recent bye-elections to place Tariff Reform in the background of their programme, or even to repudiate Imperial Preference altogether. The Confederates, who have ample means at their disposal, have decided that, in the event of any Unionist candidate adopting a similar policy at any future election, they are fully determined to put forward a candidate who will subscribe to the full policy of the Unionist Party."

Such was the method now adopted to recall erring Unionists to their Tariff Reform duties.

A third step was now taken to ensure the success of Tariff Reform. Although the funds at the disposal of the Confederates were publicly stated at this date to be ample, yet much more was needed

for the Napoleonic campaign in process of organisation. "Now is the time for making an effort," wrote Mr. Chamberlain. The urgency of the crisis brought forth the man, a gallant knight, who offered to send round the helmet, and to charge no fee for so doing.

Mr. Wyndham wrote: "If the work now done in Lancashire, Cheshire, and the North-western division of the League is to be maintained there and prosecuted throughout the country, such assistance as you tender is essential to success. I speak not only for myself, but for all who have the cause of Tariff Reform at heart, when I express our gratitude for your generosity in undertaking to raise money for the Central Fund of the Tariff Reform League without charging the League a single penny for costs of collection." Mr Bonar Law wrote: "I was interested to hear from Mr. George Wyndham that you are about to take an active part in Tariff Reform propaganda. Tariff Reform is the first item in the constructive programme of the Unionist Party, and I share in the view so strongly expressed at the outset by Mr. Chamberlain that this is a national and Imperial question which far transcends in importance any party issue."

It was hoped by this means to raise the imperial wind to an almost hurricane velocity, and to net

£250,000. The raging tearing propaganda was to blow once more.

To crown all, the Duke of Westminster asked those who subscribed £1,000 or more, to dine with him at Grosvenor House on July 30, in order to discuss "the best means for securing a decisive verdict for Imperial Preference at the next election." Thus, as Mr. Bonar Law had ruled, Tariff Reform was being organised on a "democratic basis," for every donor could be a diner, and social, had bowed before imperial, Preference. At this dinner Mr. Wyndham pointed out "the remarkable success" which had attended the special campaign of education undertaken by the Tariff Reform League in Lancashire, resulting in the gain of eighteen seats in less than three years. The idea was, not to attempt any separate organisation but to spend the money, in the main, through the existing efficient organisation of the Tariff Reform League.

The fourth measure decided upon at this crisis by the Tariff Reformers was perhaps the most significant of all. As the months went on, and as the unpopularity of the Insurance Act deepened, and bye-elections were won even in the heart of Lancashire, the fall of the Government became, in the Protectionist view, imminent and unquestionable. This transcendent prospect was marred, however, by one

unhappy blot ; the landscape was ruined by a fatal error in building. This was Mr. Balfour's Referendum. For, when they entered office, as they would do so soon, this pledge would wholly debar them from carrying Tariff Reform straightway. A Bill for the Referendum would have to be enacted first, and then the whole matter would have to be referred to the country.

To abolish the Referendum was thus essential. True, Mr. Balfour was no longer head, but Lord Lansdowne, who remained a leader, had definitely endorsed it ; and even so enthusiastic a Tariff Reformer as Lord Milner had said that he approved the Referendum because "there is something which comes even before Tariff Reform, and that is straight dealing in public life." <sup>1</sup> Indeed, an uncontradicted intimation had been published in January, 1911, that "it is agreed that the Referendum and its application to Tariff Reform as well as to other vital questions, are now part of the Unionist policy." Yet Birmingham could never like that proposal. Mr. Austen Chamberlain, indeed, had practically thrown it over in November, 1911, on the occasion of the fall of Mr. Balfour. It was now determined to have done with it officially.

In order to meet this embarrassing situation, the Tariff Reformers now "laid down a programme

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Highgate, December 1, 1910.

after careful consideration,"<sup>1</sup> and this programme was enunciated amid all the pomp and circumstance detailed in Chapter II, at the Albert Hall in November. It was, as we have seen on indisputable authority, one of the greatest, most united, and most enthusiastic meetings ever held by Tariff Reformers. The full doctrine, the unqualified creed, of Birmingham, was preached by Lord Lansdowne and by Mr. Bonar Law, and was welcomed with rapture by the delegates of the fused party. Indeed, the "fusion" seemed to assume the character of spontaneous combustion, when the leaders announced that the Government, "a vast and organised conspiracy," were about to be ejected from office. For the Tariff Reform leaders vied on that occasion in enthusiasm for their policy and in denunciation of their opponents, soaring in alternate spirals upwards to the height of their great argument for taxing bread.

All this, however, had been heard before, if on a lesser scale and in a minor key, on ten thousand platforms since the operatic season of 1903. As a spectacle, the point and gist of it was to exhibit the "fusion" of Conservatism into the Caucus. But beyond the spectacular effect, there was real business transacted here. For at this monster meeting it was finally placed on public record that Lord Lans-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bonar Law at Edinburgh, *Times*, January 25, 1913.



downe and Mr. Bonar Law definitely abjured the *bête noire* of Birmingham, the obnoxious Referendum. Thus, as soon as the Government, which had been beaten a few days before in the House of Commons and which was now assumed to be in collapse, was finally out of office, Tariff Reform could be affixed at once upon the necks of Free Traders by the glad co-operation of a Hedger-cum-Ditcher world.

But the climax came on December 12 at Glasgow, and on December 16 at Carlisle. Mr. Austen Chamberlain had never seemed to be more the master than on those occasions. He spoke with all the gravity, the restraint, the responsibility of real power: they intended to legislate for Tariff Reform, not "in the spirit of wild-cat revolutionaries, but as sober statesmen."<sup>1</sup> He defined everything, their intended imposition of a 2s. duty on wheat, their treatment of colonial produce, their 10 per cent impost on imported manufactures. He was "speaking for the leaders of the party" as well as on his own behalf. All was authoritative, explicit, commanding, sharp and precise as military orders, and heightened with the positive assurance, and even with the announcement, of victory.

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Glasgow, *Times*, December 13, 1912, also *Glasgow Herald*.



These two speeches of Mr. Austen Chamberlain mark the apogee of the Caucus. For nearly ten years that organisation had worked its hardest, under father and son, for the taxes on food, and for Protection on manufactured imports. It had pursued that purpose with unswerving, undiverted, and unrelenting resolve. Nothing had been allowed to stand in its way, not all the metaphysical mystifications of Mr. Balfour, or the fine spun web of his economic dialectics. One by one, his expedients of delay, the "Economic Notes," and the "Two Elections Scheme," his Valentine letter, his suggestion of "Broadening the Base," the House of Lords Reconstitution, and his appeal to the Referendum—all had snapped like twine and had been rent like tissue. So he had gone, or had to go. His place had been taken by Mr. Bonar Law, so useful with his chalybeate spring of invective.

Finally when, early in 1912, the new chief and his followers had seemed, in their turn, to hesitate and haver, the Caucus had put forth all its strength. The name Conservative, borne by the party for eighty years, was dropped; the Confederates declared war in the constituencies; the Imperial Fund tapped the resources of wealth; at the Albert Hall meeting the Referendum was unceremoniously thrown away; and, lastly, Mr. Austen Chamberlain himself, at

Glasgow and at Carlisle, issued his fiat and ukase of Tariff Reform.

At this moment, however, something dramatic and unexpected happened. A power advanced to assert itself. This power was the People.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PANIC OF TARIFF REFORM

THE reason why, on December 16, Mr. Austen Chamberlain delivered a Tariff Reform speech at Carlisle in one sense, and why, on the same date, Mr. Bonar Law delivered a Tariff Reform speech in another sense at Ashton-under-Lyne, was that the latter, without consulting the former,<sup>1</sup> had suddenly determined to bow to a rising storm, stronger even than the Caucus. It blew from the country.

During 1912, as has been seen already, Tariff Reformers were becoming convinced that the Government would fall at any time and that the hour of Tariff Reform had come. They therefore abandoned the Referendum in November, so that, as soon as they were in office, they might carry

<sup>1</sup> Speech of Mr. Austen Chamberlain at Acock's Green, *Morning Post*, January 14, 1913. "I had not been consulted about that declaration," *i.e.*, that of Mr. Bonar Law.

the food taxes unhindered by that pledge. On the announcement, however, of this departure the wind from the north had begun to rise decidedly, for the electorate now realised, for the first time, that, with Mr. Bonar Law as prospective Premier, and with the Referendum gone, the food taxes were definitely in sight. In that very Lancashire, for instance, which recently had transferred so many votes to the Unionists, possibly or probably on account of the Insurance Act, there was a fixed determination that food taxes, alias Imperial Preference, should not be entertained. Lancashire upset the plans of Birmingham.

Hence, during the month after the Albert Hall meeting of November 15, tension began to spread among Unionist candidates and M.P.'s. According to an account written "from within," at this date "outwardly there was no panic, but, under the surface, there was something of the kind."<sup>1</sup> To quote the same authority, "the food taxes were adhered to, or at least tacitly accepted, by all candidates and political organisers";<sup>2</sup> and Mr. Chamberlain's followers "had devoutly repeated" his maxim, as to taxing food, "for close on ten years." We learn also, however, that, "by mid-

<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, the Unionists and the Food Taxes, March, 1913, pp. 246-7.

<sup>2</sup> P. 233.

summer, 1912, more than half of the Unionists in the House of Commons would have been profoundly grateful if they could have got rid of the food duties, without appearing to abandon their principles";<sup>1</sup> for the food taxes were "a policy in which the Unionist party did not believe."<sup>2</sup>

According to this, we should arrive at the conclusion that a great party in the state had been urging upon the people of this country for many years, by an elaborate organisation, by innumerable speeches, and by the most strenuous arguments, "a policy in which it did not believe"; that this party had been denouncing Free Trade as ruinous to the Empire and had been representing Imperial Preference as necessary to the salvation of the commonwealth—yet all the time they "did not believe" it! Let us substitute any other hypothesis more consonant with the honour of our political life, and let us rather credit these statesmen with an original or acquired faith, of some degree of fixity, in their own avowals.

Adhering to this more charitable hypothesis, we must conclude that, "in the kind of panic" which they now began to feel, they realised reluctantly that the country was not friendly to their policy, and that therefore they bent before the blast. To

<sup>1</sup> P. 240.

<sup>2</sup> P. 266.

this gathering storm Mr. Austen Chamberlain was impervious, and the Caucus stood out with no surrender. Not so Mr. Bonar Law. Hence the divergent speeches of December 16.

It was Mr. Bonar Law's speech at Ashton-under-Lyne which really started the panic of Tariff Reform. In the words of Mr. Austen Chamberlain, "the speech at Ashton was undoubtedly intended to allay that restlessness, but I am afraid it did not have that effect."<sup>1</sup> The above cited voice "from within" adds to this the explanation that "after the Ashton speech, no Unionist candidate was in a position to answer yes, or no, to the plain question, certain to be asked him at every meeting: 'If your side wins are you going to put a tax on food, or are you not?' He could only answer, Perhaps."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, indeed, bewildered Tariff Reformers had to ask themselves many more questions than these. "Are we to argue that the Dominions are to have a last voice in these food taxes? If so, will the people endure it, or will the Dominions accept so invidious a charge? Will not this tend to break, rather than to bind, the Empire? And what means this divergence between Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Austen Chamberlain? With whom are we to side? If with the former, the Caucus will give us notice, and

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Acock's Green, *Morning Post*, January 14, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, p. 245.

the Confederates will punish us sorely for outraging the feelings of Birmingham. If we drop the food taxes and Preference, will not Protection go too? for the text of the Birmingham manual declares that Preference and Protection 'are part of one idea'? As we have preached for nearly ten years the doctrine that food taxes will 'lower the cost of living,' why withdraw this boon in this time of rising cost? Mr. Bonar Law says, 'we have not abandoned the food duties.' Yet again he says too, in the same speech, 'we do not want to impose those duties.'"¹ Such were the thoughts which racked and rent the conclaves of the faithful, and thus confusion spread like the plague.

Then suddenly, at the close of December, was witnessed a singular spectacle—a whole army of arguments in flight. There was no attack from without, for the Free Traders entrenched in the facts of the situation, and commanded by the best of generals, looked on with amused or grim surprise at the amazing movements on the slopes opposite. The "panic" came from within the Unionist ranks themselves.

First, that fine battalion "the foreigner pays the tax," began to melt in dire confusion, and carried with it over the crest its neighbouring regiment

¹ Speech at Ashton-under-Lyne, *Times*, December 17, 1912.

"Tariff Reform is self-sacrifice." The squadron "maize and bacon will not be taxed," that had fought so well on many battlefields, caught alarm when it saw "to tax food makes it cheaper" in the wildest disarray. The outposts, "the food taxes are small ones," had already fallen back on the main body and were momentarily swelling the rout. The artillery, "agriculture will benefit," collided in its retreat with the howitzer batteries "food will remain the same." The reserves in the rear—the Referendum and the Colonial Offer—were already stampeding out of view.

As one advanced over the terrain, a stern spectacle met the eye. Quotations in cartloads, the fodder of posters and statistics, the ammunition of fiscal arguments, the powder and shot of manifestoes—in fact, all the material of a political campaign—were mingled in inextricable confusion on the path of retreat. Here, an "imperial thought" lay motionless. There, "our declining exports" starved to death. No one had seen, or would ever see again, the flying corps of "scientific tariffs." Overridden by the Ashton explanation all the Albert Hall statements lay stark in their tracks. Valentine letters and Half-Sheets of notepaper littered the field with their recondite débris, and "Broadening the base" had not a leg to stand upon. The commissariat, with food taxes on board, hampered by the un-



welcome companionship of the "Two Elections Scheme," was viewed on a distant contour ploughing its weary way to its Colonial exile.

Yet all this was as nothing compared with what was witnessed next. On the line of retreat the "friendlies," tribes hitherto favourable to Tariff Reform, had turned on their patrons and had been, only too plainly, at their deadly work. Chief of all, and most cruel, one recognised the scalping-knife of the *Observer*. "We are in a moral interregnum." All was "flinching, finessing, shifting," and "chaotic indiscipline and furtive intrigue." "In all this miserable sequence of newspaper manœuvre, panic, stampede, and frantic snatching at supposed electioneering advantages, we see very little of real political foresight or shrewd political judgment."<sup>1</sup>

But many waited for a sign from Birmingham, for an augury from the Tuileries of Tariff Reform. None such was vouchsafed. Instead, there was an electric thunderous silence, as when cloudland is too big with storm. Then one turned from expectancy to memory—from the scene of stampede and panic before us to those slow-drawn, sharp-edged words which, issuing forth from Birmingham in a November long ago, had destroyed a Ministry and a Minister—"The weaker brethren—the brethren who have no beliefs to speak of, or have been

<sup>1</sup> *Observer*, January 12, 1913.

persuaded not to believe them too hard—they have always gone to the wall! I will not pretend to you that I am sorry. I will not pretend to you that I pity them.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, November 4, 1905.

## CHAPTER XI

### FREE TRADERS AND THE FUTURE

THE last chapter explained the cause and the character of the memorable events of the winter of 1912, when the Tariff Reformers, in the words of one of their leaders, effected a "sudden wholesale abandonment in a panic of what we have all been preaching for years about our first constructive policy."<sup>1</sup> This panic, which had started in mid December, began to abate at the opening of January, 1913, when the more cool and collected of the fugitives began to realise that their own worst enemies were themselves. Meanwhile, at headquarters a trying scene was being enacted, for Mr. Bonar Law had determined to resign. In his own words, "we had laid down a programme after careful consideration. The party did not accept it."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, no other course seemed open.

At this important crisis, an interesting and original

<sup>1</sup> See page 1.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Edinburgh, *Times*, January 25, 1913.

suggestion was made. It was proposed that every Unionist of the rank and file in the House of Commons should sign a memorial to Mr. Bonar Law, reciting the policy of "a now happily united party," and urging him not to throw up his rôle. Perhaps one of the chief advantages of this course was that, after some weeks of internecine conflict, as well as of the abandonment of three separate Tariff Reform programmes, every Unionist member might be assured, on documentary evidence, that his neighbour was on a par with himself.

This memorial, circulated and signed in the early days of January, contained, according to Mr. Bonar Law, three main features of importance. First, the old abandoned "Two Elections scheme" was disinterred and adopted,<sup>1</sup> that expedient of Mr. Balfour for postponing the food taxes which Mr. Chamberlain had so cruelly mauled in 1905. Next, "the Unionist members of the House of Commons expressed with an unanimity which, I think, has never been equalled under similar circumstances, not only their adhesion to the policy of Imperial Preference, but their determination, the moment our countrymen entrust us with power, to bring that principle into practical effect."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bonar Law explained

<sup>1</sup> See letter of Mr. Bonar Law dated January 13, 1913, published in the *Times* of January 15, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bonar Law at Edinburgh, *Times*, January 25, 1913.

at the same time that by this he meant Preference "without the imposition of new duties upon food." Next, the memorial urged that a change in the leadership "would be fatal to the best interests of the party and of the country."<sup>1</sup>

This memorial had a magical effect, and in a moment all was smiles and self-congratulation in the auditorium. The recent false notes and the cruel discord, the breakdown of the orchestra and the imminent flight of the baritone, the stampede of the stalls and dress-circle—all was smoothed away as if by enchantment. True that Mr. Chaplin, the primeval Tariff Reformer, declared that Imperial Preference without food taxes was "altogether impossible." But was Mr. Chaplin, as Mr. Balfour said of Cobden, "a scientific economist"? True that Mr. Austen Chamberlain represented presently that all this was a "great sacrifice—how great, how bitterly felt, not everyone knows."<sup>2</sup> But, then, must the Caucus be always served first, when it had already dined so well off Conservatism? It was left for the ruthlessly honourable and upright *Morning Post* to point out that "the mess of pottage, now that it has been eaten, in all the circumstances of

<sup>1</sup> Words quoted by Mr. Bonar Law in his letter dated January 13, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at the Holborn Hall, *Morning Post*, March 14, 1913.

surrender and degradation, does not seem to have made much difference in the mere electoral chances of the party." <sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the receipt of this memorial, Mr. Bonar Law finally expounded the accepted and authorised policy of the Unionists for the future. "Our policy," he said, "is perfectly definite, and it is supported now by the whole party with an unanimity which has never existed since this controversy began. If we are returned to power, we intend to do three things." <sup>2</sup> These three things he explained to be an all-round tariff on manufactured imports, Imperial Preference without food taxes, and the initiation of negotiations with the Dominions, under the Two Elections Scheme, on the question of food taxes.

As regards this triple policy a few words of comment are required. The first item, an all-round tariff, is being altered up and down ; in December last, it was 10 per cent : next month, it was defined as intended to be lower than in any other country. Whatever the final rate may be, a tariff seems certain to be imposed by the Unionists as soon as they enter into office.

The second item, Preference without food taxes, has already been condemned in advance by Mr.

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, article of March 14, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bonar Law at Edinburgh, *Times*, January 25, 1913.

Chamberlain himself, when he pointed out that "if you are to give a Preference to the Colonies, you must put a tax on food." For what the Dominions send us consists, substantially, of gold, wool, animal and agricultural products—that is, raw materials and foodstuffs. Neither the rate, nor the incidence of the proposed tariff of Preference without food taxes has yet been disclosed.

The third item, the "Two Elections Scheme" is exclusively applicable to foodstuffs. The tactical merit of this plan is that all details as to the proposed food taxes can be avoided at future bye-elections, as well as at the next General Election, and that the real campaign for these imposts is only to begin after the Tariff Reformers are in office. This plan, however, has a drawback, and a grave one. The farmers, immemorial Tariff Reformers, will be taxed at once by the all-round tariff, but must wait indefinitely for any compensating Protection for their wheat or other crops. Mr. Bonar Law responds that the farmer does not buy his things "very often." <sup>1</sup> "So much for Buckingham"!

Thus was it that, after the winter panic of 1912, the Unionist party subscribed to its fourth Tariff Reform policy in three months. Whether the country can agree with Mr. Bonar Law when he states that "our policy is perfectly definite," may

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, January 25, 1913.

well be doubted. But, at any rate, no one will venture to dispute his right to declare that "it is supported now by the whole party with an unanimity which has never existed since this controversy began."

The affairs of the Tariff Reformers have now been traced during a decade, and we leave them "a happily united party," bent on an incalculable change in the policy of this country. Before parting with them, however, it is necessary to enquire as to future prospects.

All Free Traders must take note of the recent official declaration of the Unionists that, when next in office, they will impose a general tariff and Imperial Preference without food duties; also that, as regards food duties, they intend to negotiate for them with the Dominions.

It may be thought by some that these pledges will not be honoured by fulfilment, and that those statesmen, when in office, will not execute their settled principles. It would indeed be fortunate if, almost on any terms, Free Trade could be preserved to us. Yet, that this boon should be secured at the cost of public faith, is a transaction upon which we cannot, and should not, reckon.

Accepting, then, that the Unionist leaders are as earnest for Tariff Reform as their opponents for Free Trade, we must next ascertain whether there is any likelihood that presently there may arise new



leaders in that party who may frankly supersede the present system, shake off the Caucus, and restore the Unionists lawfully and openly, without the infraction of public principles, to their former policy of Free Trade. But the reasons are only too good for thinking that, within the purview of practical politics, this will not be the case.

To arrive at the latter conclusion we need look no further than to the events of January, 1913. At that date, substantially the entire rank and file of the Unionists in the House of Commons signed a memorial in which, according to the words of their leader, they committed themselves to Tariff Reform "with an unanimity which has never existed since this controversy began." Obviously, no Free Trade leader can emerge from the ranks of those signatories. By the binding witness of that deed and covenant they are all enlisted in Tariff Reform.

There is a further consideration which Free Traders must bear in mind. "Two bad winters" will come some day, and in the ebb of international trade the fortune of Tariff Reform will begin to flow. In the strong daylight of prosperity the comet of Protection is shrouded, but, when the shades begin to fall, it comes out in the sky.

If, then, Tariff Reform fluctuates inversely to our national progress, this happens also in our Dominions oversea. Thus the wellbeing of Canada has been

at full pulse for long, but when trade shall contract and prices fall yonder, then the cry for Imperial Preference in our market, so sedulously fostered for many years by our Tariff Reformers, will come over the Atlantic in full blast. So the future opportunities are many for Tariff Reform, and the advocates of that policy, as their own statements have testified, will not be slow to use them. Even in 1912 the propaganda was enormous,<sup>1</sup> but will be more active, doubtless, in times that are more favourable to that creed.

Against such a determined attack, Free Traders must set the principle of Free Trade. This principle is that the United Kingdom requires, as vital, that surplus of food and raw materials which other nations can spare to us. That essential supply we procure by our exports. Every hindrance to that free interchange, that is, every scheme of Protection, or Retaliation, or Preference—every item in the multifarious programme of Tariff Reform—is thus calculated to work mischief to this country and must be resisted to the uttermost of our power.

From this simple and central consideration it follows that our exports, whereby we have to live, must be of such quality as to overleap foreign tariffs and to compete successfully against all comers in the markets of the world.

<sup>1</sup> See published figures in newspapers of March 15, 1913.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the tariffs of important nations were put up; in consequence, it was argued that not only would our goods be disastrously excluded, but also that the foreigner, entering into our open market, would ruin us at home as well. The answer merely is that, when this idea was started in 1903, our exports were £290,800,000. They were £487,400,000 in 1912. The Protectionists were, therefore, wrong.

But it is plausibly said, next, by the Retaliationists—if tariffs are admittedly in restraint of trade, why not do our best to lower them by threatening the foreigner with our tariffs? On that threat he must lower his tariffs against us, and thus Free Trade itself will have been advanced.

If we look, however, at our exports in 1912, it will appear that 64 per cent of them went to foreign countries, as against 36 to British Possessions. A tariff war against the “foreigner” would thus evidently be a large operation and a dangerous campaign, of which it is impossible for the wisest to gauge the result. But, more than this, we are not so strongly armed, as might appear, for such battles, if the great proportion of our imports are food and raw materials which we cannot dispense with, while the bulk of our exports are manufactured goods and services which the “foreigner” could more easily forbear to buy. Besides, to

threaten the imposition of tariffs would necessitate real action one day. So the Retaliationist turns out to be a Protectionist under the mask of Free Trade.

But it is said by the Preferentialists—let us do something for our Dominions and Possessions; we should give better treatment to our brethren than to the foreigner.

The answer is that this is precisely what we do already, on a larger scale and in a more generous measure, than any nation, burdened as we are, has ever accorded to its prospering sons. Our vast public debt was raised in good part that they might have freedom. Our colossal outlay on ships and armies is at their service. Our experts tell us that some £10,000,000 sterling per annum is the "Imperial Preference" which they, in respect of the cheapness of their borrowing in our market, annually receive at our hands. But when we are asked, in addition, to tax the food of our people for the benefit of our rich cousins oversea, we must require overwhelming proof as to the reason for our shouldering that obligation. The Preferential oracles disagree or are dumb as to why.

We, in our turn, may perhaps claim the right, or may recognise the duty, to make a few enquiries. It is not, indeed, our concern as Free Traders, that, during a campaign of ten years' duration, the Tariff Reformers have thrice consigned those who be-

lieved in them to electoral defeat. That they have banished from their councils a series of eminent men, on the charge of their distaste for Protection ; that they have utilised, and sacrificed, the old House of Lords ; that they have drained the very life, and discarded the very name, of the Conservative party are achievements of which they may be proud, or not, as they please.

But how is it that they call themselves Imperialists when they jeopardise that relationship between ourselves and India, so advantageous to both countries and so dependent on our maintenance of Free Trade? Can those be Imperialists who, throughout a decade, have been rendering the very name of Imperialism suspect, or obnoxious, to our people, by associating it with the inequitable taxation of the people's food?

Next, can those guide us aright in international trade who speak in unguarded and even contemptuous terms of the "foreigner," whereas the "foreigner" provides us with our most stable market, took in 1912 £310,000,000 of our £487,400,000 exports, and has in his keeping one half of our total investments oversea?

Lastly, can we appoint as the trustees of our national fortunes those adventurous economists whose only real programme is the fallacy that trade is to be improved by taxing it ; whose forecasts

never survive the facts ; and who would wreck that well-tried fiscal system which is not only the best for our imperial, our international, and our domestic welfare, but has secured to us in the past, and will ensure for us in the future, the industrial primacy of the world ?

## INDEX

- Act of 1819, 11
- Albert Hall Meeting—  
 November, 1910, 70-3  
 November, 1912, 4-6, 161-2
- Archbishop of York cited, 45
- Ashton-under-Lyne policy, 8-9
- Associated Chambers of Commerce, 28
- Asquith, Mr., 30  
 cited, 66, 143  
 as Chancellor of the Exchequer, cited, 32-3  
 on House of Lords, cited, 44  
 on resources of Free Trade, cited, 34
- Avebury, Lord, 38
- Balfour, Mr.—  
 cited, 11-12, 13, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 35, 54, 55, 68, 69, 83, 87, 91, 98, 104, 107, 119, 152  
 "a strong Tariff Reformer," 56  
 a Tariff Reformer "sans phrase," 52  
 and Cobden, 35
- Balfour, Mr.—(*continued*)  
 and cotton trade, 52  
 and economics, 12  
 and fiscal rhetoric, 29  
 and food taxes, 14  
 and Half-Sheet of notepaper, 22  
 and Mr. Chamberlain, 12-13, 23, 141  
 and Referendum, 57, 72-3  
 and Valentine letter, 22  
 as Bimetallist, 11-12  
 as leader, 10  
 as Protectionist in 1910, 54  
 ascendancy of in 1907, 26-7  
 at Bingley Hall, 44  
 causes of fall of, 84  
 Election address of, 1909, 52-3  
 letter to Mr. Courthope, 1910, 55  
 obscurity of, 18  
 on Broadening of Taxation, 24-6  
 on Colonial Conference, 16-17  
 on House of Lords, 64-66

- Balfour, Mr.—(*continued*)  
 on Imperial Preference, 13-14  
 on money Bills, 42  
 on 1909 Budget, 39  
 on Reciprocity, 86-7  
 resignation of, 109-11  
 six plans of, 80  
 Tariff Reform pledge of, 70, 80-1  
 "Balfour must go," 73  
 Bathurst, Earl, cited, 99  
 Belgium, tariff of, 122  
 Bimetallism, 11-12  
 Bingley Hall, 50  
 Birmingham, electoral messages of, 77  
 Board of Trade on Reciprocity Agreement, 88  
 Bonar Law, Mr.—  
 cited, 6, 8, 114, 117, 118, 119, 128, 131, 135, 136-7, 147, 148, 149-50, 152, 158, 160-61, 169, 173-6  
 fiscal opinions of, 116 *et seq.*  
 style of, 115-16  
 Borden, Mr., cited, 144-5  
 Broadening of taxation, 24-6  
 Budget and Constitution, 40-1  
 Budget—  
 of 1907, 32  
 of 1908, 33  
 of 1909, 34  
 Burke, cited, 41, 135-6  
 Byron cited, 77  
 Canada, 178-80  
 and foodstuffs, 7  
 prosperity of, 142  
 Canadian Preference, 86-91  
 Canadian Reciprocity, 84-94  
 Carnarvon, Lord, 58  
 Cecil, Lord Hugh, 18  
 Chamberlain, Mr.—  
 cited, 8, 14, 19-20, 92, 119, 123, 124, 139, 144, 147, 158, 171-2  
 letters of, 70, 87  
 on House of Lords and Budget, 44  
 telegram of, 108  
 Chamberlain, Mr. Austen—  
 cited, 5, 7, 67, 77-8, 104, 112, 113, 162, 165, 168, 175  
 and broadening of taxation, 26  
 Chaplin, Mr. Henry, cited, 1, 5, 71, 175  
 Chatham, Lord, cited, 41  
 Churchill, Lord Randolph, 30, 111  
 cited, 2, 140  
 City, and Bimetallism, 12  
 memorial against 1909 Budget, 37-8  
 Collins, Mr. Jesse, cited, 137  
 Conciliation Conference, 56  
 Confederacy, the, 154, 156-7  
 Conservative "fusion," 152, 161  
 Crewe, Lord, cited, 46, 76-7, 97, 128, 133, 134  
 Cromer, Lord, 76



- Curzon, Lord, 96  
 cited, 45, 62, 63, 94  
 and India, 134-5
- Defence, cost of, 144
- "Ditchers," 105
- "Ditcher" dinner, 108-9
- "Dodge to sweep Lancashire,"  
 74
- Economic Notes on Insular  
 Free Trade, 15-16, 140
- Education Bill of 1906, 62
- Election of January, 1906, 21
- England, foreign investments  
 of, 138-9, 143
- Exports, 181-3
- Fielding, Hon. W. S., cited,  
 89-90
- Financial procedure, 41
- Free Trade—  
 advantage of, 125-6  
 and "outlets abroad," 123-4  
 and 1909 Budget, 36-7  
 reaction against, in 1908, 27-8
- General Election, December,  
 1910, 82
- Goschen, Lord, cited, 134
- Halsbury, Lord, 105-6  
 cited, 108
- "Hedgers," 105, 109
- Hicks-Beach, Sir Michael, *see*  
 Lord St. Aldwyn
- Home Rule Bill, 149
- Hooligans, 154-5
- House of Lords—  
 and Conservative opinions,  
 95-6  
 Reconstitution Bill, 84, 94  
 Reform, 1907, 57
- India—  
 fiscal policy of, 129-30  
 gold standard of, 11  
 and cotton, 130-33  
 and Protection, 127-35
- Indian trade, 128-9
- "Inner House of Lords," 60
- Insurance Bill, 146-9
- Joint sittings, 66
- Killanin, Lord, cited, 62, 99
- Kitchener, Lord, 154
- Lancashire, 159, 166
- Lansdowne, Lord—  
 cited, 5-6, 51-2, 60, 96, 98,  
 103  
 and Referendum, 67, 97-8
- Laurier, Sir Wilfrid, 85-6, 93
- Licensing Bill of 1908, 62
- Lloyd George, Mr., 30, 146  
 and 1909 Budget, 36
- Long, Mr. Walter, 152  
 cited, 153
- Lords, House of—  
 and 1909 Budget, 40 *et seq.*  
 and taxation, 40-1  
 scene in, 44-7
- Lords of Parliament, 63

- Manufactured imports, analysis  
of, 120-2
- Martin's Bank, 38
- Maxse, Mr. Leo, cited, 24
- Milner, Lord—  
career of, 42  
and Tariff Reform, cited, 43,  
160
- Minto, Lord, cited, 130
- Morley, Lord, cited, 60, 62, 97
- Morning Post*, 83  
cited, 149, 175-6
- National Unionist party, 153
- Newton, Lord, 58-9  
cited, 61
- Observer*, cited, 171
- Old Age Pensions, 34-5
- Oranmore and Browne, Lord,  
cited, 99
- Paish, Sir George, 138
- Parliament Bill, 84, 101 *et seq.*
- Peel, Lord, 47
- Peel, Sir Robert, cited, 126
- Preference without food taxes,  
117, 127
- "Qualified" peers, 58-9
- Raglan, Lord, cited, 99-100
- Referendum, 160  
"a dodge," 74-6  
and Unionist leaders, 83
- Retaliation, 124
- Reveillé Committee, 155-6
- Ridley, Lord, cited, 67, 77
- "Round Table," cited, 166-8
- Rosebery, Lord—  
cited, 102-3  
and House of Lords, 57  
and Socialism, cited, 28, 37
- Salisbury, Lord, 57
- Schuster, Sir Felix, 38
- Selborne, Lord, 96  
cited, 3, 106, 108
- Select Committee of the House  
of Lords, 1907-8, 59-62
- Smith, Mr. F. E., cited, 2
- Speyer, Sir Edgar, cited, 139
- St. Aldwyn, Lord, 33  
cited, 11, 28
- Sugar duties, 33
- Trade of United Kingdom,  
1907-8, 33
- Two Elections Scheme, 17, 24
- Unionist Free Traders, 76
- United States, 84-7
- "Unrepresentative" peers, 58
- Valentine letter, 22, 26
- Westminster, Duke of, 159
- Willoughby de Broke, Lord,  
106  
cited, 99
- Wyndham, Mr., cited, 108-9,  
158



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Little Guides . . . . .	17	Shilling Novels . . . . .	28
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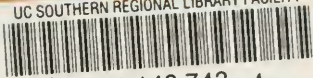
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